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# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**THE FUTURE OF THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE AND THE  
RISE OF CHINA**

by

Nam H. Han

March 2009

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Alice L. Miller  
Edward A. Olsen

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**THE FUTURE OF THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE AND THE RISE OF CHINA**

Nam H. Han  
Lieutenant, United States Navy  
B.A. Duke University, 1998

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(FAR EAST, SOUTHEAST ASIA, PACIFIC)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## **ABSTRACT**

It is inevitable that the PRC will continue to extend its influence over South Korea. Korea recognizes that China as a land-based identity has historically tried to form its sphere of influence and intervened in the Korean affairs. Despite the anti-Americanism in Korea, Seoul understands that there is a strong need for the U.S.-ROK alliance not only to deter the DPRK but also to ensure that the maritime power can counterbalance against Chinese intrusion in the Korean affairs. History shows that Korea has preferred to rely on an external power to counterbalance against a proximate power, and it would be a tough situation for the ROK to withstand the weight of the PRC alone. Seoul's security interest will dominate the cultural and economic aspects of relations with China. Therefore, Seoul has a vested interest in ensuring the pre-eminence of the United States. Seoul must send an unambiguous signal to Washington that it continues to desire the U.S.-ROK alliance while maintaining its economic relationship with Beijing. Beijing must recognize that the presence of U.S. forces is a historical and geopolitical necessity for South Korea.



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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. PURPOSE**

The economic, diplomatic, and cultural ties between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are growing. Whether the two Koreas unify or not, this trend is likely to continue. At the same time, the U.S.-ROK alliance is facing a challenge. This thesis addresses the following questions.

- How has South Korea managed its relationship with China and the United States?
- What is the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance?

This thesis argues that China has historically tried to influence Korea and the U.S.-ROK alliance is necessary for the ROK to counterbalance against the encroaching Chinese influence. Although there have been many tensions and points of friction in the U.S.-ROK relationship, the ROK derives many benefits from the U.S.-ROK alliance.

### **B. IMPORTANCE**

Washington and Beijing share a “mutual strategic suspicion”; they worry about each other's intentions and interests.<sup>1</sup> The PRC has modernized the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and the United States has “felt compelled” to enhance the capabilities of itself and the Republic of Taiwan (ROC).<sup>2</sup> Beijing worries that South Korea might be used as a supporting base of operation for Taiwan and has stated that it opposes the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> The US-ROK Strategic Forum, “The Search for a Common Strategic Vision: Charting the Future of the US-ROK Security Partnership,” The Nautilus Institute.

<sup>2</sup> Alan D. Romberg, “U.S. Strategic Interests in NorthEast Asia: 2009 and Beyond,” The Henry L. Stimson Center.

military presence in the reunified Korea.<sup>3</sup> In pursuit of its geopolitical interests, Beijing regards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as a buffer state against the United States.<sup>4</sup>

With its rising economic power and proximate location, China will undoubtedly further increase its influence in the Korean Peninsula. In the past, Korea suffered frequently when Japan or China was rising in power. The significance of the Korean Peninsula to China has not changed. The geographical location of the Korean Peninsula has been a concern to the major powers as shown in the Japanese invasion on Chosun in the 16th century, the Qing's invasion in the 17th century, the Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War, and the Korean War. As a smaller state in a power-concentrated region, Korea has to decide its foreign policy cautiously with respect to China, Japan, Russia, North Korea, and the United States.

The growing relationship between the ROK and the PRC has to be re-evaluated and reflected in the U.S. policy. The United States must decide on its policy approach to the U.S.-ROK alliance for the twenty-first Century. The ROK has been a U.S. ally since 1953. The United States has transferred its military technology and doctrines to the ROK. The ROK provides a place for the forward deployed American troops and strategic flexibility in the region. It provides a strategic location vis-à-vis China and Russia. If Washington is to counterbalance China or Russia while guarding against the DPRK, it will be crucial to maintain strong alliance with the ROK and Japan. A decline in the U.S.-ROK alliance would signal a rising Chinese influence and waning American influence.

There may be incentives for China to pull the ROK away from the United States. The ROK may benefit from maintaining an alliance with a distant overseas power against a proximate power. The ROK may even consider pursuing diplomacy separately from business. While this may have served Roh Moo-hyun's "balancer" policy, the ROK must

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<sup>3</sup> Selig Harrison, "Time to leave Korea?" *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 2 (March 1, 2001): 65.

<sup>4</sup> The US-ROK Strategic Forum, "Common Strategic Vision."

recognize that China was an imperial power and that China is an economic competitor for exports and resources. It remains to be seen if Seoul can pursue its policy independent of Beijing's influence.

If the ROK switches sides and bandwagons with the PRC, there may be profits lost in the absence of a close relationship between Seoul and Washington. Yet if Seoul is to balance against the PRC, Seoul is likely to incur heavy costs: its diplomatic and economic relationship with China would deteriorate, and Beijing would ensure the survival of the DPRK to balance against the U.S.-ROK alliance, perceived as a threat to the PRC's influence in the region.

China and Korea share a long period of history, though there was a gap in their relationship from the late nineteenth century up to the Sino-ROK normalization in 1992. Starting in the late nineteenth century, Korea has gone through radical changes, and when one's identity is in flux, people look to history for an insight. The future behavior of Korea will be decided by how the Koreans view their past in comparison with practical and realistic expectations of the future. The Koreans will compare how China and the United States have dealt with Korea in the past.

Northeastern Asia has not had an active war since 1953. With more than five decades of tentative peace under the 1953 armistice, perhaps it is possible for peaceful behavior to be institutionalized beyond the truce agreement. Regardless, the U.S. military presence in the ROK deters provocation in the region and provides stability. The North Korean nuclear question and Korean reunification, however, remain unresolved. If the United States is able to maintain the ROK-U.S. alliance with the reunified Korea, it may bring benefits to all concerned or increase tension with the PRC. It is important to review the direction of the ROK-U.S. alliance while the PRC is on the rise.

### **C. ORGANIZATION**

This thesis follows the historical evolution of the relationship between Korea and China in Chapter II. It tries to develop and utilize the idea of China as a land-based territory. It describes the burdensome Qing-Chosun tributary system, the detrimental



consequence of the Kuomintang's (ROC) refusal to recognize the Korean Provisional Government (KPG), the hostile relations between the PRC and the ROK since 1948, the Sino-ROK rapprochement since the 1970s, and the growing relations between the PRC and the ROK in recent times. Although the cultural and economic ties between the PRC and the ROK have grown closer, the cultures of the ROK and the PRC are fundamentally different, and the complementary economic relationship may turn into a competitive system. Realism dominates the cultural and economic aspects.

Chapter III deals with a shorter period of the U.S.-ROK relationship and how the Koreans have felt about the U.S. policy in the ROK. It is self-evident that the ROK has derived much benefit from the United States. Chapter III also focuses on challenges to and implications for the U.S.-ROK alliance, examining especially in depth the sentiment of anti-Americanism, which remains a particular concern for the U.S.-ROK alliance and underscores much historical narrative since the 1980s. The degree of the anti-Americanism has fluctuated widely since the 1980s, and yet the U.S.-ROK alliance has endured. As long as the United States and the ROK share compatible political goals, namely the ROK's desire to distance itself from the PRC's sphere of dominance and the United States' desire to counterbalance the PRC, the U.S.-ROK alliance is a geopolitical necessity. The DPRK remains as the foremost problem in East Asia. It is crucial for the current Lee Myung-bak administration to steer the ROK closer to the United States than to the PRC. It is crucial for Washington to maintain a closer relationship with Tokyo and Seoul against encroaching China. Washington and Seoul must focus on commonality and accommodate each other's interests as much as possible. Seoul must send a clear signal to Washington that it will remain closer to Washington.

This thesis proceeds on the premise that the ROK is the rightful successor to Chosun and the KPG, and it assumes that, in case of a reunification, the ROK will absorb the DPRK despite the PRC's objections. This thesis is interested in the viewpoint of the Korean people with regards to the major powers and what direction Seoul will choose. Although this thesis recognizes the importance of culture and trade between nations as important factors in international relations, it recognizes that realism and geopolitical necessity trump cultural and economic factors.

## **II. A HISTORY OF THE SINO-KOREAN RELATIONSHIP**

Korean sovereignty declined with respect to independence from China-based empires through the successive regimes of Silla, Goryeo, and Chosun. Finally, Imperial Japan annexed Chosun in 1910. For the first half of the twentieth century, the Koreans fought for independence and sovereignty from the rule of Imperial Japan. Since the Korean War, the South Koreans have struggled against communism and sought economic prosperity and full democracy. Because of the colonial period and the Cold War, South Korea and China were separated and resided in different spheres of influence. Japan severed the Qing-Chosun tie. The Cold War and U.S. influence helped to maintain the separation of China and South Korea, and the ROK has been able to pursue its foreign policy independently, for the most part, from China's interests. The ROK currently finds itself at a crossroad yet again, however, regarding how to adjust to the changing geopolitics of a resurgent China and the souring U.S.-ROK alliance.

Although the history, culture, and literature of China have been taught and enjoyed by South Koreans, the idea of a tributary system and the Chinese influence do not appeal to a new generation, who grew up in democracy and the syncretism of the Western and Korean cultures.

### **A. THE QING AND CHOSUN**

Stephen Walt argues that “small and weak states in close proximity to a great power are the most likely candidates for bandwagoning.”<sup>5</sup> He also argues that “states form alliances to balance against threats rather than bandwagon with them,”<sup>6</sup> and that balancing is more prevalent because states desire the preservation of sovereignty rather than “subordination under a potential hegemon.”<sup>7</sup> Walt's theory, however, is not applicable to Chosun because Chosun did not voluntarily bandwagon with Qing, but was

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security* 9, no. 4 (Spring 1985): 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

forced to be a tributary state. Furthermore, Choson did not make an alliance with Japan to counterbalance against Qing. Korea, in fact, has never formed an alliance with Japan against China.

In contrast, Randall Schweller argues that bandwagoning is “far more widespread than Walt suggests,” and that “the most important determinant of alignment is the compatibility of political goals, not imbalances of power or threat.”<sup>8</sup> This certainly seems applicable to the Sino-ROK rapprochement in the 1980s because of the “convergence of interests” between Beijing and Seoul.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, under the Qing-Chosun tributary system, it can hardly be argued that there existed compatible political goals as equal powers. Before the technological innovations in communication and transport, it was infeasible for Qing’s tributary states in the periphery such as Vietnam, Okinawa, and Korea to form an alliance against Qing. Since Chosun rejected an alliance with Japan, it had to withstand Qing’s influence alone.

Whereas Walt sees threat as the factor that determines alliance behavior, Schweller sees self-preservation as a cause for balancing and “self-extension or gain” as a cause for bandwagoning.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, Schweller’s prediction does not apply to Korea since Korea historically did not bandwagon with Qing China for “self-extension or gain.” Rather, the tributary system was imposed on the Korean Peninsula by force. Even before the Manchus invaded Ming China, Nurhaci subjugated King Injo of Chosun.

Jonathan Spence argues that the Qing emphasized and utilized its cultural superiority to maintain its relationship with its tributary states.<sup>11</sup> The Qing-Chosun

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<sup>8</sup> Randall L. Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit,” *International Security* 19, no. 1 (July 1, 1994): 75.

<sup>9</sup> Jae Ho Chung, *Between Ally and Partner: Korea-China Relations and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 22.

<sup>10</sup> Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit,” 74.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 118, 119.

relationship was based on the Confucian idea that like a person, every state had a proper station in the international order.<sup>12</sup> Chosun was the “model tributary nation” of “the perfected Chinese pattern.”<sup>13</sup>

“Chinese culture did in fact exert an influence upon the psychology of the people of Korea.”<sup>14</sup> The Qing “did not exercise intentionally any purely cultural influence on Korea” because Chosun was already “fully sinicized.”<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Confucianism proved to be detrimental to Korea because it prevented the adoption of the Western concept of sovereignty based on equal status; and Chosun lost its sovereignty because it did not let the foreign powers counterbalance each other.<sup>16</sup>

The relationship between China and Korea was not as harmonious as it seemed. Most of the 930 foreign invasions in the Korean Peninsula came from China; nevertheless, Koreans today have “positive – even unconditionally favorable” views regarding China, and it appears that the Koreans have forgotten the PRC’s military intervention in the Korean War.<sup>17</sup>

Sinocentric studies describe the Qing-Chosun tributary system as “harmonious” and overlook the “conflict and tension”; Chosun hid its “hostility” toward Qing.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, contemporary South Koreans are likely to recall the Qing-Chosun relationship with resentment and may openly criticize China if the PRC’s policy is seen as imperial toward South Korea.

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<sup>12</sup> Immanuel Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 130.

<sup>13</sup> Diana Lary, ed., *The Chinese State at the Borders* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 129.

<sup>14</sup> Hae-jong Chun, “Sino-Korean Tributary Relations in the Ch’ing Period,” in *Readings in Modern Chinese History*, ed. Immanuel Hsu, 90-112 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 105.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, “Organized Hypocrisy in Nineteenth-Century East Asia,” *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 1, no. 2 (August 1, 2001): 190.

<sup>17</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Lary, ed., *Chinese State at the Borders*, 131.

The Qing-Chosun tribute system was not beneficial to the Chosun's economy. Chosun sustained a net loss from the tributary system because Qing imposed a heavy burden on the tribute and restricted trade flow.<sup>19</sup> Trades were limited to three border locations and were held semi-annually, annually, and biannually, and Chosun sustained an estimated net loss of 500,000 taels of silver in total legal and illegal trades.<sup>20</sup> Chosun sent its tribute missions four times a year along with a considerable amount of "gifts" to the Qing's officials and spent an average of one-sixth of Chosun's annual budget to maintain the Qing embassies.<sup>21</sup>

Culture and trade were not the major factors that caused and maintained the Qing-Chosun tributary system. In 1619, Chosun sent 20,000 troops to aid the Ming and fight against the rising Qing. While the Qing was rising in power, Chosun supported Ming. Subsequently, the Qing invaded Chosun twice before it launched an offensive into Ming. It was the military might of the Qing that subjugated Chosun as a tributary state. In the second Qing invasion in 1627, Nurhaci forced King Injo to prostrate in obeisance and took the Chosun crown prince as a political hostage to ensure Chosun's compliance and submission to Qing.<sup>22</sup> The Qing-Chosun tributary system started with a major humiliation for Chosun and further retarded the recovery of the Chosun's national strength after the invasion by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the 1590s.

Andre Schmid asserts that the Qing-Chosun tributary system was far from "harmonious," and in fact, "hostilities" existed throughout.<sup>23</sup> Chosun felt enmity at the rise of the Manchus; Chosun documents reveal frequent "anti-Manchu pejoratives," and the Chosun elite rejected the Manchus as the "successor of the Chinese tradition."<sup>24</sup> Sino-centric studies overlook the Chosun records and reflect only Qing official records,

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<sup>19</sup> Chun, "Sino-Korean Tributary Relations," 104-105.

<sup>20</sup> Chun, "Sino-Korean Tributary Relations," 103.

<sup>21</sup> Hsu, *Rise of Modern China*, 102, 132.

<sup>22</sup> Lary, ed., *Chinese State at the Borders*, 130.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 127-128.

which suggested a “semblance of an ideal tributary system.”<sup>25</sup> When a smaller nation has to exist under an imperial state, an institutionalized behavior of non-cooperation and subterfuge may be an effective, if not the only tool to employ. It would be interesting to see whether this historical precedent has carried over into the negotiating behavior in the Korean Peninsula.

The Chosun government attempted to minimize the intrusion of Qing. When the Kangxi Emperor sent his envoy to survey the border between Qing and Chosun, Chosun manifested “obstreperous non-cooperation” and a “subdued defiance”; even the Chosun king even subverted the survey efforts, but despite knowledge of being deceived, the Qing envoy only blamed heavy weather and river along the border, while the Chosun border agents reported their success at foiling the survey efforts.<sup>26</sup>

The Confucian way of assigning proper station in the international order was imposed on Chosun because of Qing’s superior military power and underlying threat. Chosun simply could not compete against the Qing. If Chosun were to declare its independence from the Qing tributary system, the Qing would have used its military, much like the situation of the PRC and the ROC. Ideally, Chosun’s focus was on the preservation of its sovereignty and minimum interference from the Qing.

The Qing would have been reluctant for other tributary nations to declare independence. The Qing imposed exorbitant tribute and investiture rituals and ensured that Chosun remained economically and militarily weak. What Chosun paid in tribute in comparison to Qing’s revenue did not amount to much, but it ensured a tight budget in the Chosun court and hampered military spending. The tribute system maintained the stability and dominance of the Qing by weakening the border states. This is in stark contrast with the U.S. policy in helping its allies to become strong. South Koreans must see that the American system worked for their interest. The traditional Chinese system worked against the Chosun’s interest of achieving a strong statehood.

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<sup>25</sup> Lary, ed., *Chinese State at the Borders*, 140.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 138, 141.

In the late nineteenth century, Li Hongzhang still considered Chosun as the Qing's "fundamental territory" and "outer dominion and protective fence for Manchuria."<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, as Qing realized its inability to defend Korea and itself against the West, it started to advise Chosun to open up to the West. When Japan attacked Kanghwa Bay, the Qing attempted to disengage from Korea, stating that Chosun "always had complete freedom in its domestic and foreign affairs."<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, Chosun signed treaties with the United States, Britain, France, and Germany in the 1880s, and the Qing-Chosun tributary system was undermined.<sup>29</sup> Even so, the Qing and Chosun wanted recognition of Chosun as a tributary state to Qing, but the United States and other Western powers rejected it.<sup>30</sup>

At this crossroad, hedging behavior can be seen in a letter Chosun sent to Washington. Chosun tried to maintain its traditional role as a tribute state and at the same time tried to establish an equal status with the United States.

Cho-sen (Korea) has been a state tributary to China from ancient times. Yet hitherto full sovereignty has been exercised by the king of Cho-sen in all matters of internal administration and foreign relations. Cho-sen and the United States, in establishing now by mutual consent a treaty, are dealing with each other upon a basis of equality. . . . As regards the various duties which devolve upon Cho-sen as a tributary state to China, with these the United States has no concern whatever.<sup>31</sup>

Although the Qing tried to maintain its influence over Chosun, it was the military might of Japan that ended Qing's tributary system over Chosun. Also, it was the military might of the Qing that severed Chosun's allegiance to Ming. The Qing wanted to maintain its hegemony over Chosun and prevent Japan's expansion into Korea, but Japan set up a Korean "regent" after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894.<sup>32</sup> After the defeat of its

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<sup>27</sup> Immanuel Hsu ed., *Readings in Modern Chinese History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 274.

<sup>28</sup> Hsu, *Rise of Modern China*, 334.

<sup>29</sup> Spence, *Search for Modern China*, 220.

<sup>30</sup> Krasner, "Nineteenth-Century East Asia," 190.

<sup>31</sup> Key-hiuk Kim, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order: Korea, Japan, and the Chinese Empire, 1860-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 315.

<sup>32</sup> Spence, *Search for Modern China*, 222.

northern navy, the Qing signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki, acknowledging “the full and complete independence and autonomy of Korea” and recognizing Chosun as a Japan’s protectorate.<sup>33</sup> The tributary relationship between the Qing and Chosun came to an end. The Qing was not able to protect Chosun despite enfeeblement of Chosun with burdensome demands for tributes. The Qing-Chosun tributary system failed Chosun when Chosun most needed the Qing’s protection against external threats.

## **B. CHINA AND KOREA UNDER IMPERIAL JAPAN**

In the period from 1910 to 1945, Chinese and Koreans shared a common political objective of ousting Imperial Japan from the continent, but differed with regards to the “Korean question.” The Korean Provisional Government (KPG) was not an organization that the ROC saw as fit to head the Qing’s former tribute nation. The ROC did not recognize the KPG as the legitimate government of Korea, and this had a detrimental effect for the Korean Peninsula.

Among the limited materials, more is written about the relationship between the KPG and the ROC than between the Korean communists and the CCP. This section briefly deals with the interaction between the Korean communists and the CCP, and describes how the ROC dealt with the KPG and the “Korean question.” Also, in doing so, it describes the formative years for the ROK and the DPRK. Nationalism and Kim Il-sung’s *Juche* ideology are the natural byproducts of this era.

Chosun ceased to exist officially after the 1910 Annexation Treaty. Japan used Korea as an industrial base and supply line for the conquest of China, and Korea became an “appendage of Japan’s home economy.”<sup>34</sup> For Imperial Japan, Korea was at the strategic center for Manchuria.<sup>35</sup> In this period, most books deal only with the Japanese colonialism and its impact on Korea.

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<sup>33</sup> Spence, *Search for Modern China*, 223.

<sup>34</sup> Nym Wales, “Rebel Korea,” *Pacific Affairs*, 15 (1942): 29-30.

<sup>35</sup> Daeyeol Ku, “Korean International Relations in the Colonial Period and the Question of Independence,” *Korea Journal* 38, no. 4 (January 1, 1998): 112.



After the Korean Independence Movements of 1919, many Korean activists fled to Chinese treaty ports and Manchuria.<sup>36</sup> By the 1930s, one million Korean immigrants lived in Manchuria, and 50,000 to 70,000 Korean partisans fought against Japan.<sup>37</sup> By 1945, two millions Koreans lived in Manchuria.<sup>38</sup> The interaction between China and Korea came from Koreans in exile.

In the late 1930s, the CCP at Yanan supported the North China Korean Volunteer Army (NCKVA) and the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army (NAJUA).<sup>39</sup> In Manchuria, the Koreans comprised 90 percent of the CCP and 80 percent of the anti-Japanese guerillas; in 1936, 80 percent of the two regiments under Kim Il-sung's Third Division of the CCP were Koreans.<sup>40</sup>

The ROC and Imperial Japan both opposed communism, and the Koreans who were suspected as communists, nationalists, or Japanese agents were "murdered from both sides."<sup>41</sup> By 1941, Imperial Japan eliminated 200,000 Korean communists and guerillas, the CCP expelled between 500 to 2,000 Koreans in 1933 to 1936; and Stalin killed "every" Korean communist within his reach.<sup>42</sup> Kim Il-sung survived both purges by the Chinese and the Soviets. The North Korean communists who survived the purge must have realized the need for a Korean nation that would not question the identity and loyalty of its citizens. Xenophobic nationalism was an inevitable consequence.

There is a similarity in how Qing and the ROC dealt with the Korean Peninsula. Although the ROC was not an imperial power, it sought influence over the Korean Peninsula and a new regional order after the Pacific War. The strategic significance of Korea did not change. The ROC did itself a disfavor in not recognizing the KPG, however, perhaps due to the KPG's independent spirit that had sought a departure from

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36 Erik W Esselstrom, "Japanese Police and Korean Resistance in Prewar China: The Problem of Legal Legitimacy and Local Collaboration," *Intelligence & National Security* 21, no. 3 (June 1, 2006): 343.

37 Wales, "Rebel Korea," 32.

38 Bruce Cumings, *North Korea* (New York: the New Press, 2004), 109.

39 Chae-jin Lee, *China and Korea* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1996), 3.

40 Cumings, *North Korea*, 108-114.

41 Ibid., 110-111.

42 Ibid., 111, 118, 120.

the previous Qing-Chosun relationship. The ROC's decision not to recognize the KPG had a significant impact on the Cairo Conference in 1943 and the Yalta Agreement in 1944. Much blame for the division of the Korean Peninsula traces back to the ROC in not recognizing the KPG and promoting the independence of Korea.

China as a territory-based identity has a similar geopolitical concern over the Korean territory. Although the imperial investiture by Qing ceased to exist, the potential legitimization and recognition of the KPG by the ROC carried an important consequence. And for a long time, the ROK and the DPRK refused to recognize each other as legitimate governments. They both derived their legitimacy from external powers. The question remains as to how a united Korea would obtain its legitimacy from the PRC. It is unquestionable that Washington and Tokyo would promptly recognize a united Korea. Even Russia would promptly recognize a united Korea to balance against the PRC's influence in the region.

While the KPG existed for the independence of Korea and depended on the ROC for meager financial and military support, the ROC influenced the United States not to recognize the KPG and sought to reassert influence over Korea.<sup>43</sup> As long as the ROC's interest was reflected, it cooperated on a multilateral approach of the United States that sought a stable world order through the United Nations and multilateral trusteeships.<sup>44</sup>

After a unity conference between Korean organizations in Seoul, Shanghai, and Siberia, the KPG was formed in Shanghai in 1919 with Syngman Rhee as the first President.<sup>45</sup> The KPG asserted that it represented the entire Korean people and sought historical legitimacy as the successor of Chosun.<sup>46</sup> Although the KPG was not internationally recognized, the ROK regards the KPG as its predecessor.<sup>47</sup>

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43 Ku, "China's Policy toward Korea," 229.

44 Ku, "Korean International Relations," 120.

45 Robert J. Myers, *Korea in the Cross Currents* (New York: Palgrave, 2001): 43-44.

46 Ibid., 45.

47 Young-woo Han, "60-Year History of the Republic of Korea – an Observation of Causes and Effects," *Korea Focus*, July 11, 2008.

As Japan advanced, the KPG followed the ROC to Chongqing. It then created the Korean Restoration Army (KRA) in 1940 “with the special approval of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek,” and it was to “continue the war of resistance in cooperation with the people of the Republic of China and as a part of the Allied Forces in order to defeat the Japanese imperialists.”<sup>48</sup> The Declaration of the Korean Restoration Army (KRA) emphasizes the Korean independence but states vaguely on Chiang Kai-shek’s role for the PGK.

We are pleased that Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek . . . has adopted a far-sighted policy regarding the Korean people. . . . His moral support greatly encourages the movement for liberation of our nation and especially the preparation for armed resistance against oppressive Japanese enemy.<sup>49</sup>

Although the ROC controlled the KRA, it did not properly provide command structure and adequate supply.<sup>50</sup>

In December 1941, the KPG requested diplomatic recognition from the United States. It declared war against the Axis powers and sought support from the Allies and a UN membership.<sup>51</sup> Washington and London aligned their views closely with the ROC’s view on the KPG.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, the ROC was “not enthusiastic” about the KPG and notified Washington that the factionalism within the KPG and continuing Japanese victories rendered it premature to consider the diplomatic recognition of the KPG.<sup>53</sup> However, the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and the U.S. declaration of war against Japan brought together different factions among the Korean independence groups under the KPG.<sup>54</sup> In addition, recognizing the KPG as the legitimate government of Korea would have weakened the Japanese claim on the Korean Peninsula. Robert Myers suspects that

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<sup>48</sup> Yongho Choe, Peter H. Lee, and WM Theodore de Bary, eds., *Sources of Korean Tradition, Vol. 2: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 349.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 349.

<sup>50</sup> Ku, “China’s Policy toward Korea,” 224-225.

<sup>51</sup> Choe et al., *Sources of Korean Tradition*, 350.

<sup>52</sup> Ku, “China’s Policy toward Korea,” 220.

<sup>53</sup> Ku, “Korean International Relations,” 122.

<sup>54</sup> Ki-baik Lee, *A New History of Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 366.

the ROC skeptically viewed the KPG's leadership because of the Chinese "traditional low opinion of Koreans."<sup>55</sup> Consequently, Washington refused to recognize any particular Korean liberation organization and placed Korea under the "general dispensation" of Asian colonies at a later time; and this policy was unchanged and carried over to the Cairo Declaration in 1943.<sup>56</sup>

The Chinese view weighed significantly on the issues of the liberation, independence, and division of Korea. While the anti-Japanese activity of Korean independence groups may have benefitted China, the ROC did not recognize the KPG or any other Korean independence group, and this had a detrimental effect on the Korean Question. Had the ROC recognized the PGK, its legitimacy and international recognition would have helped the exiled Korean leadership to consolidate different factions, but instead, the ROC overemphasized to Washington the factionalism in the Korean independence movement.<sup>57</sup>

Korean nationalists asserted that the ROC did not recognize the KPG because it wanted to reassert its former influence over Korea after the fall of Imperial Japan.<sup>58</sup> In fact, following a Qing method of dealing with Chosun, the ROC created a triumvirate which created further factionalism within the Korean independence movement as each ROC member insisted on his exclusive control.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the Koreans resented that the ROC treated Korea as a frontier of China, similar to Tibet and Mongolia.<sup>60</sup>

Korean diplomacy was not effective. The Chosun court's efforts toward a diplomatic solution for maintaining sovereignty failed in the 1890s when it briefly and frantically sought external powers to counterbalance each other, or to serve as a patron to Chosun. Its final effort to send delegates to the Hague Conference to assert its sovereignty failed and caused the abdication of its king. Despite the Koreans' anti-

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<sup>55</sup> Myers, *Korea in the Cross Currents*, 49.

<sup>56</sup> Ku, "Korean International Relations," 123.

<sup>57</sup> Ku, "China's Policy toward Korea," 222-223.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 220-223.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Japanese efforts in Manchuria, the KPG failed to convince the ROC to recognize it as the legitimate government of Korea. Because of the problems of weak funding and military power, the influence of the KPG was limited.<sup>61</sup> While the KPG failed to convince Washington that it was the legitimate government of Korea, there was not an alternative organization to form a national government.

External legitimization and support will continue to be important on the Korean Peninsula. The reunification of Korea will be partly dependent on the Chinese policy regarding the DPRK and post-reunification order more so than the influence of the United States because Washington is in favor of for the absorption of the DPRK by the ROK. The PRC remains as a stumbling block for the Korean reunification, as it considers the DPRK vital to its interest.

### **C. THE PRC AND THE ROK SINCE 1949**

The Sino-Korean relations “started with hostility” as the ROK in 1948 recognized the ROC as the only legitimate government, while the PRC in 1949 recognized the DPRK as the only legitimate government.<sup>62</sup> The PRC rescued the DPRK during the Korean War, the PRC-DPRK alliance opposed the U.S.-ROK alliance, and the 1960s Sino-ROK relationship was mutually hostile. Nevertheless, from the mid 1970s, Seoul started approaching Beijing, and Beijing took its time until the 1980s to respond to Roh Tae-woo’s Northern Diplomacy.<sup>63</sup> The Sino-ROK normalization in 1992 is significant in that Beijing and Seoul chose to overlook the past and focus on cooperation. The ROK was finally able to obtain recognition from all major powers. It closed the historical and cultural gap between China and Korea.

The PRC intervened in the Korean War despite belligerent Taiwan, heavy inflation, and the remnants of the civil war in Sichuan, Guizhou, and Tibet.<sup>64</sup> When Kim

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<sup>61</sup> Myers, *Korea in the Cross Currents*, 45.

<sup>62</sup> Hak-joon Kim, *North and South Korea: Internal Politics and External Relations since 1988* (Toronto: The Society for Korean and Related Studies, 2006): 182.

<sup>63</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 19.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 15.

Il-sung requested for the PRC military intervention in the Korean War, the PRC was less than one year old since its creation on October 1, 1949. China suffered through a long civil war between the ROC and the CCP. Zhou Enlai and Lin Biao argued for consolidating domestic power and avoiding an unfavorable fight against the nuclear United States, but Mao Zedong argued that the PRC inevitably had to fight against the United States.<sup>65</sup>

This time, unlike the Sino-Japanese War, the PRC proved that it could fight off a major foreign power in its hemisphere of influence. In the Korean War, the PRC proved that it was willing to sacrifice for the DPRK and that Beijing, and Pyongyang shared a mutual interest in security.

Along with the heavy casualties of the war, the PRC sacrificed a chance to annex Taiwan or to become a member of the UN.<sup>66</sup> Ironically, even though Beijing generously supported Pyongyang, Kim Il-sung manipulated the Sino-Soviet split for his gain.<sup>67</sup> Unlike the hegemony of the Qing, the PRC had a competing power in the region, as the dynamics of the power play in East Asia changed.

The PRC prefers the DPRK as a buffer zone rather than a unified Korea under the American influence.<sup>68</sup> Whereas the United States “pledged continued support for South Korea” in a joint communiqué of 1972, the PRC insisted on the withdrawal of all foreign forces.<sup>69</sup> And then the sudden Sino-American rapprochement was followed by a joint communiqué in 1972 between Seoul and Pyongyang for a peaceful unification of Korea, independent of foreign intervention; and Beijing supported it because it wanted to maintain the stability in the Korean Peninsula and to avoid tension with Washington and Tokyo.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> William Stuek. *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 98.

<sup>66</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 57.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>68</sup> Robert E. Osgood, *Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 184.

<sup>69</sup> Spence, *Search for Modern China*, 632.

<sup>70</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 67-68.

In 1971, Seoul began to consider “diplomatic normalization with the Soviet Union and Communist China with flexibility and seriousness,” and it repeatedly signaled its intent to Beijing.<sup>71</sup> The 1972 Nixon Shock gave an impetus for Seoul to seek rapprochement with Beijing, and in 1973, Park Chung-hee declared that Seoul desired to “establish relations with all socialist nations.”<sup>72</sup> In 1988, Roh Tae-woo declared the same.<sup>73</sup> However, domestic turmoil in Beijing from 1975 to 1977 prevented progress toward rapprochement.<sup>74</sup>

As the PRC’s domestic politics became more pragmatic under Deng Xiaoping and Beijing adopted the open-door economic policy, in the 1980s, Beijing gradually sought cooperation in non-political matters.<sup>75</sup> In 1983, to resolve the issue of a hijacked Chinese plane, Beijing and Seoul signed an official document, bearing the name of each state for the first time.<sup>76</sup> Later that year, Beijing invited South Koreans to a UN conference in China.<sup>77</sup> The Sino-Korean relation started to adopt a new tone and their hostility began to disappear. The repeated signals for rapprochement from Seoul started receiving positive response from Beijing.

In the 1980s, Beijing chose to lessen tension on the Korean Peninsula and informed Washington and Tokyo that the DPRK lacked capacity and intention to invade the ROK and Beijing would not support a DPRK invasion; but at the same time, Beijing acknowledged that due to the USSR and the DPRK’s *Juche* ideology, Beijing’s ability to influence Pyongyang was less than what it seemed.<sup>78</sup> Beijing sought stability on the Korean Peninsula. By going public with its intention, Beijing made clear to Pyongyang that Pyongyang would not receive help in case of a war triggered by the DPRK. With the

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<sup>71</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 106.

<sup>72</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 182.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>74</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 31.

<sup>75</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 5, 110.

<sup>76</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 183.

<sup>77</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 108.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 79.

collapse of the USSR, however, Beijing became the only patron of Pyongyang and shared common interests with Pyongyang in preserving the communist system, rejecting foreign interferences, and opposing the presence of the USFK<sup>79</sup>

Even though the ROK was headed by a series of autocratic military leaders -- Park Chung-hee, Chun Doo-hwan, and Roh Tae-woo -- there had been a consistent foreign policy regarding improving relations with the PRC. The groundwork for the success of the Northern Diplomacy was laid under military dictatorship in Korea. Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan supported opening trade with the PRC.<sup>80</sup> This consistency in foreign policy had the effect of convincing Beijing that Seoul was sincere about the normalization and cooperation. Besides, Seoul had nothing to gain by aggravating Beijing and solidifying the Sino-DPRK alliance.

One sign of the thaw in the Cold War was that both capitalist and communist countries participated in the 1988 Seoul Olympics. The Seoul Olympics were meaningful for the rapprochement between the capitalists and the communists. It also served a domestic purpose of placating mass demonstrations for democracy and labor movements, and it brought visitors to the remote peninsula. The Seoul Olympics and the Beijing Asian Games in 1990 increased semiofficial contacts between Beijing and Seoul.<sup>81</sup> Shortly after the Seoul Olympics, South Koreans attended a trade fair in Guangzhou and the Asian Development Bank in Beijing; and by 1990, regular transportation lines were opened between the ROK and the PRC.<sup>82</sup>

Northern Diplomacy also benefitted from the investments in the PRC by private Korean businesses. Korean investment came at a time when many Western businesses

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<sup>79</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 90.

<sup>80</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 59.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>82</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 189.



were reluctant to invest in the PRC in the late 1980s.<sup>83</sup> In 1991, Beijing and Seoul set up trade offices at each other's national capitals; they fostered economic cooperation and acted on consular matters such as visas.<sup>84</sup>

Jae-ho Chung observes that despite a separation of 97 years, from 1895 to 1992, the rapprochement between the PRC and the ROK seems natural because of geopolitical interests, trade, "emotions, sentiments, and perceptions."<sup>85</sup> He also theorizes that the lack of experience with the "real China" promoted a South Korean favorable sentiment toward China and "wishful expectation," but more interaction might cause disappointment.<sup>86</sup>

The USSR and the Soviet bloc responded to Seoul's diplomatic efforts earlier than the PRC.<sup>87</sup> Considering that the PRC and Japan signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship in May 1978 and the PRC and the United States normalized their diplomatic relationship in 1979, the PRC showed much reluctance in normalizing relations with the ROK because of its close alliance with the DPRK and ideological commitment of the CCP leadership. Beijing prefers the status quo in the Korean Peninsula so as not to deal with the U.S. presence in the ROK.

The 1992 Sino-ROK normalization illustrates the political difficulty for Beijing in acknowledging the two-Koreas policy, as Beijing maintained an alliance with Pyongyang. From the early 1980s to the Sino-ROK normalization in 1992, Beijing separated political and economic relations with Seoul, focused on non-political matters, and deliberately slowed the normalization because of Pyongyang.<sup>88</sup> Both Seoul and Beijing approached normalization in a cautious and patient manner.

Whereas Beijing gently signaled to Pyongyang the likelihood of the Sino-ROK normalization and gave time for Pyongyang to get used to the Sino-ROK rapprochement, however, Seoul kept the possibility of normalization secret and abruptly severed its

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<sup>83</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 187.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>85</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 17.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 112.

<sup>88</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 192.

diplomatic tie with Taiwan.<sup>89</sup> One wonders if the ROK's abrupt behavior is a general characteristic of the ROK's diplomatic style,<sup>90</sup> and whether a similar behavior will be seen in the future. Seoul calculated that Beijing was far more important than Taipei, despite the U.S. policy of strategic ambiguity. Although the ROC was one of the first nations to recognize the ROK in 1949, when more benefits from the Sino-ROK relation were perceived by Seoul, Seoul had no qualms about severing its tie with Taiwan.

Beijing and Seoul normalized in September 1992. Whereas Beijing was able to assert its one China policy, it was impossible for Seoul to insist on a "one Korea" policy as both Tokyo and Washington previously abandoned Taipei for the normalization with the PRC. At the same time, because of the unique situation of the divided peninsula, Seoul could have insisted on maintaining diplomatic relationships with both Beijing and Taipei.

Seoul saw the tension around Taipei and did not want to get involved in the Taiwan question, although this could have provided Washington a useful tool for strategic ambiguity and flexibility by influencing its ally, the ROK, to adopt policies in favor of Taiwan. However, Seoul was content to normalize with Beijing without the hassle of Taiwan and the possibility of incurring displeasure from Beijing.

Pyongyang remains without diplomatic recognition from Washington and Tokyo. If Washington and other major powers allow Pyongyang to normalize, it would be interesting to see if Pyongyang desires outright normalization, or if Seoul would employ a gradual normalizing process similar to the Sino-ROK normalization. Since Washington does not allow relations with Pyongyang to be normalized, it seems that Seoul is employing a slow and gradual rapprochement process through the economy, sports, and tourism, as was used in the rapprochement process with the PRC. Seoul's slow process of rapprochement with Pyongyang may help to placate Beijing. The abrupt collapse of

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<sup>89</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 73.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 74.

the DPRK will cause concern in all powers as to who which military would occupy North Korea. Given the historical tendency of China, it is inevitable that the PRC will send its troops to the DPRK in case of the DPRK's collapse.

It was notable that Seoul's foreign policy displayed a consistency and patience in approaching Beijing for cooperation and ultimately the normalization. Had the normalization not occurred, the ROK would have further deviated from the influence of and the contact with China. The need for the U.S.-ROK would have been stronger. Perhaps with more time, South Koreans might have emerged with a much more separate identity from the Chinese than it already is. Koreans and the Chinese were never the same. The questions are whether Seoul can increase its legitimacy on the Korean Peninsula more so than Pyongyang in the eyes of Beijing and how much closer the Seoul and Beijing relationship will grow.

#### **D. THE PRC AND THE ROK SINCE 1992**

Sino-ROK normalization enhanced the international status of the ROK, weakened the Sino-DPRK alliance, forced Pyongyang to accept the ROK as a legitimate government, and improved the ROK's economic prospects.<sup>91</sup> Historically, the Qing legitimized the Chosun court by imperial investiture, and Chosun's tribute obtained security. Whereas the tribute system was imposed on Chosun, the ROK succeeded in establishing equal relations with China. The challenges for the ROK are how to maintain its independent policy and in case of reunification by absorption how to obtain a total recognition from Beijing as a one nation. A question may arise: if quid pro quo, would Seoul be willing to sacrifice the U.S.-ROK alliance or dissolve the UN command and the USFK? Or would the reunified Korea assert its sovereignty and power in East Asia against the PRC's hemisphere of influence?

If Beijing fostered a closer relation with Washington, Seoul might not have to face the dilemma. However, a deteriorating Sino-American relationship may test Seoul's diplomatic skill. For Seoul, if the trans-Siberia railroads and Siberian oil pipeline run

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<sup>91</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 185.

through Manchuria, along with geopolitical stability, the need for diplomatic tranquility and economic cooperation with Beijing will grow. The extensive interconnectedness of the economies of the PRC and the ROK has already increased the importance of stability. The trade between Manchuria, the ROK, and perhaps the DPRK may increase. The expanding trade may work in favor for Seoul to open up the DPRK economy and foster cooperative behavior.

Since the 1992 normalization between the PRC and the ROK, their relationship has been labeled as “relations of friendship and cooperation” during the Roh Tae-woo administration, “cooperative partnership” during the Kim Dae-jung administration, and “comprehensive, cooperative partnership” during the Roh Moo-hyun administration.<sup>92</sup> Still, China’s closest diplomatic relationship is with the DPRK, termed a “traditional cooperative friendship.”<sup>93</sup>

In 2008, President Hu Jintao and President Lee Myung-bak upgraded the bilateral relationship to “strategic cooperation” and agreed to communicate on foreign strategy to cooperate on telecommunication, nuclear power generation, and a Sino-Korean FTA, to expand cultural and personnel exchange, to promote stability in Northeast Asia, and to reform the UN.<sup>94</sup> Earlier, in May 2008, for the first time since the 1978 normalization between the PRC and Japan, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and President Hu issued a joint statement and agreed to develop a “strategic reciprocal relationship” that acknowledges their different positions and yet pursue common interests.<sup>95</sup> It seems that Beijing wants to foster regional cooperation, but Beijing sees it more practical and feasible to have Seoul closer than Japan. Historically, Korea never formed an alliance with Japan. Nevertheless, would Seoul display flexibility and consider allying with Japan if the Sino-American relation were to deteriorate? Few Korean military strategists worry

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92 “Lee Embarks on China Visit,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, May 27, 2008.

93 “Ties with China Require Delicate Handling,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, May 28, 2008.

94 “Lee, Hu Agree to Upgrade Bilateral Relationship,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, May 28, 2008.

95 “Japan, China Agree to Promote Strategic Ties,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, May 8, 2008.

about the rising military capability of the PRC, and yet Seoul has “maintained a sort of strategic ambiguity” as to whether the PRC is a direct threat and as to how to correspond to it.<sup>96</sup>

#### **E. THE ECONOMIC TIES BETWEEN THE PRC AND THE ROK**

Beijing prefers the economic success of the ROK over the dismal economy of the DPRK that became burdensome to the PRC.<sup>97</sup> Former CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobang admitted that the developmental model of the ROK, Yugoslavia, and Romania influenced China’s open policy; and Beijing preferred the Korean export-driven economic model.<sup>98</sup> Beijing discarded the economic growth models of Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan due to scale and political issues.<sup>99</sup> Overall, the ROK appealed to the PRC because of the ROK’s cooperation with the PRC’s economic priorities, its intermediate technology suitable for the Chinese economy, its proximity along the coast, and the historical unsuitability of Japan and Taiwan.<sup>100</sup> Also, the PRC’s policy of delegating economic decisions to provinces helped to avoid political issues with Pyongyang.<sup>101</sup>

As Beijing adopted pragmatism and a policy of separating business and politics, the PRC entered into an indirect trade with the ROK in 1979.<sup>102</sup> The PRC started seeking business with all nations as long as profits existed.<sup>103</sup> The indirect trade between the PRC and the ROK occurred mostly through Hong Kong, and the total indirect trading volume grew rapidly from \$19 million (1979) to \$280 million (1981).<sup>104</sup> Certainly, this increasing amount of trades gave expectation to Beijing and Seoul that the future benefits

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<sup>96</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 95.

<sup>97</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 142.

<sup>98</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 27.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>100</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 149.

<sup>101</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 65.

<sup>102</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 133-134, 144.

<sup>103</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 25.

<sup>104</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 144-145.

of economic cooperation would be significant.<sup>105</sup> Economic cooperation preceded the politics and the normalization. Oddly enough, a communist state and a capitalist state were linked by economic profits.

Even before the normalization in 1992, in the 1980s, a number of the members of South Korean chaebols visited the PRC, and the ROK established the International Private Economic Council of Korea (IPECK) to facilitate economic cooperation with communist nations and invited Chinese economic delegations to the ROK.<sup>106</sup> Seoul displayed a consistent policy in pursuing closer Sino-Korean economic cooperation, despite Korean labor unrest and the democratic movement against a series of Korean military regimes.

Seoul was able to capitalize on the collapse of the Cold War, the Chinese domestic policy of pragmatism and economic growth, and the compatibility of economic goals. Seoul saw that it was better to do what was feasible and displayed a savvy diplomatic foresight in establishing indirect trade.

Economic cooperation built mutual interests between Beijing and Seoul and helped to thaw the Cold War enmity due to increasing expectation of profits. Beijing began to see that the economic profits from dealing with the ROK was worth more than before but took time to allay any fear from the DPRK on the growing economic relationship between the PRC and the ROK.

Seoul's Northern Diplomacy and its understanding of the Chinese history also helped to establish official trade. The ROK had a political purpose of ensuring the Chinese exports to the ROK even when the ROK was incurring a trade loss with the PRC.<sup>107</sup> The ROK has pursued an export-driven economy and sought a trade surplus with the United States, but Seoul calculated that the trade deficit with the PRC still had the geopolitical advantage of befriending the PRC and diminishing the exclusive communication between Beijing and Pyongyang.

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<sup>105</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 23.

<sup>106</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 147.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

By 1988, the Sino-Korean trade went from a “closed secret, then to an open secret, and finally no secret whatsoever.”<sup>108</sup> The economic cooperation between Beijing and Seoul benefitted both parties in a complementary way: the PRC provided resources and cheap labor, and the ROK provided technology and capital.<sup>109</sup> The significance of the expanding Sino-Korean trade is that along with the desire for a stable North Korea, Beijing and Seoul shared a common economic interest, and the more their economies were interconnected, they were likely to seek for a closer relationship and face a common difficulty in economic cycles. Nevertheless, if the Sino-ROK economic relationship becomes competitive, tension may come.

The PRC and the ROK have rapidly grown closer politically and economically since the diplomatic normalization in 1992.<sup>110</sup> In 2007, the bilateral trade between the PRC and the ROK amounted at \$145 billion, \$20.6 billion less than the combined trade with the United States (\$83 billion) and Japan (\$82.6 billion).<sup>111</sup> In 2003, the ROK invested \$4.7 billion in China and \$4.2 billion in the United States, and China became the largest market for the South Korean exports.<sup>112</sup> Seoul has displayed an astute economic policy that foresaw initial trade deficits as an investment for a bigger return. How long can the ROK maintain profits with China? Although in the 1990s, the complementary nature of the Sino-ROK trading cemented the economic relationship, a competitive economic relationship is likely to appear in the long run.<sup>113</sup>

The tribute system and Qing-Chosun trades heavily favored the Qing, and Chosun incurred an annual net loss. Modern Korea finally has turned it around and is making a trade surplus with China. However, as the PRC catches up with the ROK in exports markets such as ship construction and other Korean niche markets, the trade surplus with

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<sup>108</sup> Lee, *China and Korea*, 147.

<sup>109</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 198.

<sup>110</sup> David Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia Press, 2007), 120.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Kang, *China Rising*, 116. His source is from “Korea’s China Play,” *Business Week*, March 29, 2004.

<sup>113</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 49.

the PRC might be temporary, and the ROK may experience fierce competition with the PRC. As the world economy deteriorates and the PRC and the ROK compete for overlapping export markets and dwindling resources, there will be more economic tensions, and the conflicts of interests over profit may arise.

As long as the geopolitical status quo can be maintained, Seoul will be pressured by the concern for the economic well-being of its citizens. Economic security is a matter of big concern for the ROK. An expansionary cycle of the world economy is preferable than a contracting world economy. It remains to be seen how Beijing and Seoul will deal with each other in the current world recession.

In order to ensure economic security, Seoul may adopt an economic policy of making the PRC's economic infrastructure and technology dependent on those of the ROK. Given the PRC's understanding of Asian economics and their technological aspiration and manpower, however, the economic competition between the PRC and the ROK is inevitable. The PRC may be able to replace the ROK with other nations or become self-sufficient in terms of the technological knowhow. Once the PRC achieves technological advantage over the ROK, the economic system in East Asia may revert to a system similar to the situation in which China controlled the flow of money and made profits from the peripheral states. The ROK may find it hard to increase per capita income.

A break for the ROK may come through the cheaper wages and natural resources of the DPRK. The reunification will necessarily utilize nationalism for economic unity, and *Juche* ideology may be modified to bring the North Koreans into the Korean economic model. It is likely that Beijing would find *Juche* ideology repelling. It will be interesting to see what policies Seoul pursues to make trade surpluses with the PRC and the United States, and its impact on the Sino-Korean relations and the U.S.-ROK alliance.

## **F. THE CULTURAL TIES BETWEEN THE PRC AND THE ROK**

The Sino-DRPK alliance and the U.S.-ROK alliance opposed each other and created the cultural barriers between the DPRK and the ROK; and between the PRC and



the ROK. While there was much influx of entertainment media from Hong Kong and Taiwan to the ROK, the mainland China did not influence the modern Korean culture, and much of the Chinese influence in this period in the ROK remained in the form of the Chinese classics of literature and philosophy. Will the Chinese and Koreans find commonality from the Chinese classics and relate better with each other?

The Sinocentric culture dwindled in the ROK as English emerged as the most emphasized foreign language and replaced the Chinese in significance due to the vast U.S. market while the Chinese market remained closed. Christianity is the most prevalent religion in the ROK, unlike any other place in Asia except the Philippines. The PRC remains atheistic. The Cold War structure gave a chance for the ROK to remain at a distance from the Sinocentric world while maintaining a close relationship with the United States and the West.

Interestingly, there has been a reversal of the direction of entertainment and culture as “Hallyu,” the Korean Wave, made its way into Chinese media and found wide popularity among the Chinese. This would create Chinese curiosity about the Korean culture and history.

In 2008, there were 444,000 Chinese immigrants in South Korea, comprising 44 percent of the total number of immigrants while the Americans comprised 12 percent.<sup>114</sup> By the end of 2002, 36,093 (42.1 percent of all foreign students in China) South Korean students were studying in China compared to 49,046 South Korean students (8.4 percent of all foreign students) in the United States.<sup>115</sup> In 2005, 43,000 (48 percent of all foreign students in China) South Koreans were in the PRC, and there were over half a million Korean residents in the PRC.<sup>116</sup>

The rise of the number of South Korean students in China is remarkable. It shows a rising inclination toward the Sinocentric world. Before the fall of Chosun, Korean students went to China to further their education. Then, during the colonial period, they

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114 Hyeon-ji Jeong, “Korea Heads toward a Multicultural Society,” KOREA.NET, June 6, 2008.

115 Jae Ho Chung, “America’s Views of China-South Korea Relations: Public Opinions and Elite Perceptions,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 17 (2005): 216.

116 Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 95.

had to go to Japan. When the United States gained pre-eminent influence on the ROK through its military and economic assistance, most Korean students came to the United States. Nevertheless, Sino-Korean relations went through rapid rapprochement since 1992 such that shifts and magnitude of cultural and economic exchange can be seen, though it is unclear if the PRC may replace the United States as the choice destination of Korean students and how much closer the Sino-Korean cultural and educational relationship will become. As long as the United States remains as the world leader in knowledge, more qualified Korean students will study in the United States.

The increasing number of exchange students in China may reflect the rising influence of China and also its much lower educational costs compared to those in the United States and the ROK. If the economic class is the dividing line, richer and conservative students would tend to come to the United States while more proletariat and adventurous students would go to China. Each class would exhibit different political leaning.

The question remains as to whether South Koreans will revert to their traditional affinity to the Sinocentric culture or whether the influence of the United States and the West has left indelible marks that causes the South Koreans to see the Chinese as a much different identity. The Koreans in the twentieth century went through radical economic, religious, educational, and governmental transformations in each generation due to the changes in international events. The most salient difference between the ROK and the PRC are the ideological differences in the distribution of wealth, the preferred forms of government, and the religion. South Koreans have a much different identity that survived the forceful assimilation into the Japanese culture during the colonial period. They will see China as a foreign entity and are likely to resist assimilation into the Chinese culture.

The Chinese under the communist influence have gone through cultural changes also, most notably during the Cultural Revolution. The questions remain as to how and what degree the Koreans and the Chinese will find commonality and resolve conflicts that arise from the increased contacts. Although there had not been mass

demonstrations on the issues of melamine as there had been against the importation of the U.S. beef on the perceived fear of Mad-Cow Disease, anti-Chinese sentiment may emerge as more Sino-ROK incidents arise.

South Koreans are aware that many tainted and fake agricultural products from the PRC are sold in the ROK. During the Beijing Olympics, a nationalistic Chinese youth hit a South Korean professor. A Chinese fisherman in the Korean territorial water killed a South Korean coast guard officer and escaped. There are “uncivil faces of China,” Chinese maritime piracy, Chinese fishing vessel’s intrusion into the Korean territory, and Beijing’s repatriation of the North Korean refugees to the DPRK gulag system.<sup>117</sup> The dust storm from the Gobi Desert and pollutions from the Chinese manufacturing industry reach the ROK. If Seoul decides to join an international community concerned about the global warming and eco-friendly policy, there may be a conflict with Beijing. Also, the Chinese diplomatic officials in the ROK have become “audacious” and “intrusive” in the Korean affairs.<sup>118</sup> This audaciousness reminds the Koreans of the Qing empire.

The more salient dividing point may present itself on if or how the PRC chooses to reveal its policy on the possible collapse of the DPRK. If it is believed that the PLA will be sent to the DPRK for stabilization and border control, this will invoke the memories of the PLA participation in the Korean War that prevented the unification of the two Koreas. The left wing of Korean politics may find itself unable to sustain its influence. Even left-wing nationalists will oppose the PRC. Korean nationalists and the right wing will gain power. Most Koreans will see the PRC as a continuation of an empire that interfered with the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Korea. Seoul will have to find a middle ground not to offend Beijing and yet placate the Korean populace with perhaps falling economic means due to the competition from the PRC. South Koreans may find it unjust at the PRC’s reluctance for the ROK’s absorption of the

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<sup>117</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 101.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 101-102.

DPRK. The elite of the ROK feel “uneasy” about rising China; most elite prefer the status quo and the U.S.-ROK alliance and agree that the U.S. presence is vital for the stability in East Asia.<sup>119</sup>

Finally, there is the issue of religion. Christianity is the predominant religion in South Korea. Korean evangelists, whether Christian or Buddhists, may find the PRC a target for conversion if the PRC allows religious freedom. Some Korean Christians are engaged in smuggling North Korean refugees across the PRC-DPRK border and do not agree with the Chinese policy of capturing and repatriating North Korean refugees. The PRC’s intolerant policy on the North Korean refugee and religious freedom arouse resentment for the Korean evangelists.

The earlier missionary works by the Americans since the late nineteenth century centered on the progressive ideas and liberation from Imperial Japan. If Christianity is introduced from Korea to China, it will be interesting to see what elements might be introduced to the Chinese culture. However, it is unlikely that the PRC will tolerate the incursion of foreign religion. However, if so, Korea is poised to become a religious center in East Asia, and ultimately, the United States can claim that it has a part in religious influence on China since most Christian missionaries came from the United States. It will be interesting to see if the Korean evangelists form an alliance with the American evangelists.

Nevertheless, tourism may bring the Chinese and Korean cultures closer. For the natural resources deprived ROK, export is a matter of national security. Its efforts to diversify revenue via tourism will not be successful due to its remote location from the West and the harsh climate. Seoul is nearly equidistant from Berlin, Sydney, and Hawaii. Rather, Asian tourists are likely to find South Korea as an attractive destination. If tourism is increased, it is more likely to bring Asian and Korean cultures together, and it may form a tourism bloc. The rise of oil prices may have a negative impact on Korean

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<sup>119</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 100.

tourists going outside to Western Europe and the United States. More Koreans are likely to visit China due to proximity and low cost of travel.

Sung-bin Ko recommends an independent diplomacy for Seoul and warns that cultural affinity and the South Koreans' "irrationally friendly sentiment" may soon develop into "dependency" on China as the "traditional patron" of Korea.<sup>120</sup> Contrary to Ko's argument, however, at some point of time, the initially friendly attitudes of the Koreans towards the Chinese will begin to fade. The Koreans and the Chinese have different identities. Also, ultimately, it is not the culture but the geopolitical necessity that dominates international relations.

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<sup>120</sup> Sung-bin Ko, "South Korea's Search for an Independent Foreign Policy," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 36, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 258-273.

### **III. THE FUTURE OF THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE**

#### **A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE U.S.-ROK RELATIONSHIP**

The Eisenhower administration wanted to make the ROK a “showcase of democracy.”<sup>121</sup> After four decades or so, full democracy appeared, but the new Korean democracy did not look kindly on its benefactor as anti-Americanism swept throughout the society. The Koreans perceived that Washington wanted democracy in Korea but often supported authoritarian Korean regimes during the Cold War. Some alleged that Washington pursued an “anti-communist, pro-American alliance” rather than supporting democracy per se in the ROK.<sup>122</sup> It is widely known that many described the U.S.-ROK relations as a client-patron system. However, whereas the Qing-Chosun tributary system extracted Chosun’s national wealth, the U.S.-ROK client-patron system used economic and military carrots to institute desirable behavior in the ROK and helped the ROK to become strong. Nevertheless, as the ROK matured in democracy, South Koreans have become assertive and resent foreign involvement in their domestic affairs.

As the Cold War ended and the South Koreans began to enjoy better living conditions and freedom, people started voicing their resentment in the form of the anti-Americanism rather than displaying their gratitude to the United States for guarding against the DPRK and providing much needed security and stability. The conflict and tension between Washington and Seoul are only natural consequences of the U.S. policy of making the ROK a fully democratic nation. The influence of Washington in Seoul gradually waned as the ROK grew in stature and capacity. It will take time for Washington to fully appreciate the maturation of the Korean democracy. It will take time for Seoul to understand the global strategic needs of Washington.

The United States saved the ROK from the communism and helped it to recover by providing security and financial aid in contrast to the imperial practices of Qing and the brutal colonial rule by Imperial Japan. For the first time in Korean history, it seemed

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<sup>121</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 204.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 205.

that Korea has finally found the answer to its geopolitical dilemma. Powerful Japan is pacified under the restraint and umbrella of the United States. The PRC and the DPRK are deterred by the presence of the United States Forces Korea (USFK). Russia is now partially democratic and is far more concerned with its internal consolidation and European affairs. The ROK is profiting from trade with the United States and China. The frequent demonstrations of anti-American sentiment and former President Roh Moo-hyun's balancer policy, however, eroded American confidence in South Korea as a dependable ally. Furthermore, the United States is beginning to resent the ingratitude of the assertive South Koreans. It remains to be seen how President Obama and President Lee Myung-bak will improve the U.S.-ROK alliance, and whether the worsening economic situation in the United States will necessitate a reduced footprint of the USFK in the Korean Peninsula.

### **1. 1963 to 1993**

Unlike the Qing-Chosun tributary system, the client-patron system of the ROK and the United States was beneficial to Korea. Seoul received much economic and military support from the United States. Under the Mutual Security Act (MSA) from 1953 to 1961, Washington provided \$4.4 billion in military and economic aid to the ROK; under the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) from 1962 to 2002, Washington provided \$9.9 billion in military and economic aid to the ROK; from 1946 to 2006, Washington provided \$11.1 billion in grants to Seoul and \$3.8 billion in loans.<sup>123</sup> In 2002, Washington stopped the military aid, and, since 2003, the economic aid has virtually stopped: as of September 2006, the outstanding balance of the loans was at \$307 million.<sup>124</sup> The ROK improved its military and economic capacity, reduced its dependency on the United States, and was able to pull itself out of the client-patron system in the twenty-first century.

For the strategic interests of the Cold War, Washington supported the authoritarian regimes of Syngman Rhee, Park Chung-hee, Chun Doo-hwan, and Roh Tae-

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<sup>123</sup> "US Overseas Loans and Grants [Green Book]," <http://quesdb.usaid.gov/cgi-bin/broker.exe> (accessed on 30 January 2009).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

woo. The ongoing agenda for Seoul before 1993 was how to balance security, democracy, and economic prosperity. While the populace wanted a full-scale democracy, the authoritarian governments of the ROK focused on the security against the DPRK and suppressed dissension against the military regimes. South Koreans saw that, at times, Washington sacrificed democracy in Korea for its strategic need and the stability in the region. Korean conservatives wanted security while liberals, nationalists, and anti-authoritarian protesters clamored for full democracy. Carter's human right policy was the saving grace for the United States.

In fact, many times, Washington admonished Seoul to be more democratic. For example, Washington leveraged economic and military aid to pressure Syngman Rhee to be less authoritarian, and Kennedy urged Park Chung-hee to turn the regime over to a democratic process,<sup>125</sup> Reagan, however, supported Chun Doo-hwan's authoritarian military government. When the USSR invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Washington saw the Korean Peninsula as a vital front against communism.<sup>126</sup> After all, while Saigon fell in 1975, the ROK was a symbol of success of the U.S. fight against the communism.

It also strengthened the legitimacy for the authoritarian regime. Military tension on the Peninsula and anti-communism became tools for the military regime to divert the focus from the issues of democracy to the fear over security. The military regime used the issues of security to clamp down on the dissenters. It heightened the sense of hostility between Seoul and Pyongyang and hampered the democratic flourishing in the ROK. Therefore, the military regime had to gain support from external powers. Had Washington supported the Korean dissenter movement, the military regime would have had a tough time to maintain its power.

The authoritarian regimes before the Roh Tae-woo administration in 1988 had to maintain a close relationship with Washington. Washington preferred a regime that was strongly anti-communist. Seoul wanted the market and security provided by the United

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<sup>125</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 203-204.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 210.



States. Because the United States was the major export market for the ROK, Washington could have pressured Seoul for a political change, but it preferred stability over the uncertainty of a democratic government.

Seoul's priorities were security, economic growth, and democracy. Democracy had to give way to the immediate need for the security and economic growth. Democracy had to be closely guarded against the irrationality of the mass democracy. Given the real security concerns about the belligerent DPRK and the autocratic and undemocratic disposition of the South Koreans in this period, it was not possible for full democracy to flourish. It may have been too early for the ROK to enjoy a full democracy since it takes time for a generation to learn the democracy and for the older authoritarian generation to pass away.

One aspect of the U.S.-ROK alliance is the security anxiety felt by Seoul and the frequent reassurance of Washington about the security of the ROK. The Nixon Doctrine, the withdrawal of 24,000 U.S. troops in the ROK in 1973, the fall of Saigon in 1975, and Kim Il-sung's visit to Beijing in 1975 caused anxiety in Seoul such that in 1977, Park Chung-hee sought the development of nuclear weapons.<sup>127</sup> The Park regime saw the DPRK as a real threat. Park Chung-hee was concerned with economic growth. The withdrawal of the USFK meant a heightened threat level, a dangerous signal to Pyongyang, and expenditure of national budget for the self-defense. For a poor nation with no credit line, it was hard to pursue both security and economic growth. If more were to be spent on security, economic growth would have to be postponed. The economic growth was vital not only for the welfare of the Koreans, but also to achieve a stronger military and an independent policy.

Carter's policy to withdraw all ground troops from the ROK was met with fear in Seoul, believing that such a move would send a wrong signal to Moscow and Beijing.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Yur-bok Lee and Wayne Patterson, eds. *One Hundred Years of Korean-American Relations, 1882-1982* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1986), 110-111.

<sup>128</sup> Lee and Patterson, *Korean-American Relations*, 117.

After Washington pulled out the U.S. military from Korea in 1948, the Korean War erupted. Along with U.S. economic aid, the presence of the USFK provided useful leverage in the Korean politics.

While the Carter-Chun era was marked with Washington's focus on the human rights issue in the ROK, the Reagan-Chun era became more harmonious as Washington focused more on anti-communism and overlooked the human right issues in the ROK,<sup>129</sup> but the anti-Americanism started spreading in the 1980s.<sup>130</sup> In the late 1980s, as the South Korean economy and stature improved, the "client state behavior" of the ROK diminished.<sup>131</sup>

Although many blame the United States for the client-patron system, the ROK gained security, and its economy grew. Though full democracy came later than Korean dissenters wanted, the period before the 1990s laid the groundwork for democracy. Education, the media, living standards, and understanding of democracy improved over this period. Tension came from the impatience of the Korean nationalists, who prematurely asked for full democracy. At the same time, one can argue that the military regimes and the presence of the USFK heightened the security anxiety felt by Pyongyang. Veterans of the Korean War were at the helm of the military regime. They perceived the DPRK as the enemy. A similar circumstance arose in the DPRK leadership.

At times, there existed a mismatch of the priorities of Washington and Seoul. When Seoul was militant, Washington sought to restrain Seoul from provoking Pyongyang. When Park Chung-hee became belligerent against the DPRK, Washington discouraged Seoul from seeking a unification by military means and instead supported inter-Korean dialogue.<sup>132</sup> There was disharmony between Chun and Carter's human rights policy. One common approach between Washington and Seoul, however, was that security preceded democracy. Even Carter stopped withdrawing the USFK.

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<sup>129</sup> Lee and Patterson, *Korean-American Relations*, 120-122.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>131</sup> Edward A. Olsen, *U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 42.

<sup>132</sup> Lee and Patterson, *Korean-American Relations*, 111.

The ROK served as a symbolic and real bastion of the fight against the communism. Japan did not have to face an immediate threat from the communism because of the security parameters around the ROK. Overall, the ROK benefitted greatly from the help and the economic support of the United States. Though there are those who lamented the suppression of democracy, it was a historical necessity. Compared to the Qing-Chosun tributary system, the client-patron system was far more beneficial for the ROK. Unlike the Qing-Chosun tributary system, the client-patron system economically and militarily helped the ROK. It also allowed the ROK to grow out of the client-patron system. It is evident what the ROK has achieved under the United States and the current decrepit status of the DPRK under its close relationship with the PRC.

## **2. 1993 to the Present**

The fully democratic and economically successful ROK has become more assertive. In recent years, the ROK has ranked between tenth to thirteenth largest GDP with the fifth largest foreign reserves and fourth largest total number of new patents.<sup>133</sup>

Before 1993, the ROK had to withstand communism, achieve democracy, and expand the economy. Whether it was due to the patience of Washington or the impatience of the Korean citizens, the status of democracy was much improved in the 1990s. Democracy had the effect of lessening the ROK's former belligerent policy against the DPRK. The civilian leaders were less hostile toward the DPRK than the military leaders.

The rise of democracy and anti-Americanism helped to bring former dissidents to the Blue House. Democratically elected leaders, such as Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung, are well known for their struggle against the authoritarian military regimes of the ROK, and when the populace elected them to the office, they gained their legitimacy from the people.

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<sup>133</sup> The US-ROK Strategic Forum, "Common Strategic Vision."

The new civilian leaders were able to employ more independent policy from the influence of Washington because the ROK had achieved better economic and military strength. When Kim Young-sam was democratically elected in 1993, he proclaimed that

Since [the military leaders] assumed the presidency illegally or undemocratically, they had no authority. Therefore, they had to depend upon Washington for its support of their respective authorities . . . As the democratically elected president, I don't have to bow to the U.S. president.<sup>134</sup>

The policy of Seoul reflected the changed demands of citizens and the civilian members of the government. Seoul seeks to become less dependent on Washington.<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, Seoul has to accommodate the U.S. policy without compromising its independent policy because of the necessity for the security provided by the United States.<sup>136</sup> Even if it has improved its economic and military capability, the presence of the USFK is vital to the security of the region.

Kim Young-sam sought a hardliner approach toward Pyongyang while Clinton sought engagement with Pyongyang.<sup>137</sup> Clinton admonished Kim Young-sam against a strategic retaliation against the DPRK after the discovery of a DPRK submarine in the ROK territory in 1996.<sup>138</sup> Washington initially welcomed Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy, but disagreement arose on the nuclear issues of the DPRK; Seoul viewed Clinton's policy on Pyongyang as a hardliner while Washington viewed the Sunshine Policy as too lenient toward Pyongyang.<sup>139</sup> The George W. Bush presidency and the *axis of evil* speech "fundamentally altered" U.S.-ROK relations.<sup>140</sup> Tension between Washington and Seoul was the highest during Roh Moo-hyun's administration.<sup>141</sup> Bush and Roh held fundamentally different visions. Bush turned the U.S.-ROK clock back to

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<sup>134</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 208.

<sup>135</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 90.

<sup>136</sup> George Ehrhardt, "The Evolution of US-ROK Security Consultation," *Pacific Affairs* 77, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 670.

<sup>137</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 211.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>141</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 222.

the Reagan era of an ideological fight against communism. Thus, since the 1990s, U.S.-ROK relations worsened with each administration as Seoul discarded its previous hawkish approach to Pyongyang and adopted the Sunshine Policy. The DPRK was the major issue of tension between Washington and Seoul. Eight years of the Bush administration worsened the U.S.-ROK alliance, the perception of the Koreans on the U.S. policy, the DPRK nuclear issue, and the inter-Korean relationship.

Roh Moo-hyun is well known for his anti-Americanism. Nevertheless, he desired the status quo in regard to the U.S.-ROK alliance and chose to send the ROK troops to Iraq.<sup>142</sup> There was a long debate in the ROK parliament as to whether and how many troops to send to Iraq. The Iraq Invasion was a very unpopular issue in the ROK. Seoul did not want to offend the Middle East since they depend on their oil. The chance of Islamic terrorism in the ROK is nil because of Seoul's indifferent stance on the issues of Israel, its remote location, and the lack of an Islamic population. Nevertheless, Roh decided to reciprocate for the U.S.-ROK alliance, but in a much smaller number of non-combatant soldiers compared to the peak number of 50,000 South Korean combatant soldiers in the Vietnam War.

Unlike Washington's desire for regime collapse or change, Seoul wants to maintain the status quo in the Korean Peninsula. It has not vociferously complained about the major powers' wish for the status quo in the division of the Korean Peninsula although this hampers the reunification. Despite Roh Moo-hyun's support for the U.S.-ROK alliance, Seoul and Washington have different views on the DPRK threat, the nonproliferation of the WMD, and the stability.<sup>143</sup>

Although the ROK and China have grown closer and despite the anti-Americanism, Seoul wants to maintain its close relationship with the United States.<sup>144</sup> President Lee Myung-bak reaffirmed that the USFK contributes to "the peace and

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142 Selig S. Harrison, "South Korea-U.S. Alliance Under the Roh Government," Nautilus Institute, April 11, 2006.

143 Ehrhardt " US-ROK Security Consultation," 665.

144 Kang, *China Rising*, 120.

stability in East Asia and beyond Northeast Asia.”<sup>145</sup> Seoul and Washington have a ritual of mutual reassurance for the alliance. Lee Myung-bak wants to repair the U.S.-ROK relationship and stressed common objectives with regard to the DPRK.<sup>146</sup> President Bush and Lee Myung-bak met again in August 2008 in an effort to strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance based on the “values of free democracy and market economy”, to address Pyongyang’s denuclearization and human rights issues, and to intensify effort to pass the U.S.-ROK FTA.<sup>147</sup> It remains to be seen how Presidents Obama and Lee would form a common vision.

## **B. THE CHALLENGES FOR THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE**

### **1. Anti-Americanism**

Most Korean surveys from 1988 to 2005 reveal a rising trend that South Koreans favor the PRC over the United States.<sup>148</sup> Before the 1980s, anti-Americanism was not evident, but in the early 1980s, 62 percent of Korean responders (20 to 39 years old) indicated anti-Americanism.<sup>149</sup> Another survey indicates a clear generational divide: the older generation favored the United States far more than the younger generation.<sup>150</sup> Jinwung Kim believes that anti-Americanism is inevitable because of changed demographics and a changed relationship between Washington and Seoul.<sup>151</sup> Surveys from 1990 to 1992 indicate that 76.2 percent of anti-Americanism stems from economic

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145 “South Korea’s President Looks to Repair U.S. Ties,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 2008.

146 Norimitsu Onishi, “South Korea’s President Looks to Repair U.S. Ties,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 2008.

147 Cheong-mo Yoo, “Lee-Bush Summit Dims Outlook for Inter-Korean Relations,” *Yonhap News Agency*, August 6, 2008.

148 Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 96.

149 Jinwung Kim, “Recent Anti-Americanism in South Korea: The Causes,” *Asian Survey* 29, no. 8 (August 1, 1989): 752.

150, Chang Hun Oh and Celeste Arrington, “Democratization and Changing Anti-American Sentiments in South Korea,” *Asian Survey* 47, no. 2 (March 1, 2007): 334.

151 Kim, “Anti-Americanism in South Korea,” 751-753.

and political resentment, and 20.8 percent was related to nationalism.<sup>152</sup> It appears that anti-Americanism is an expression of discontent when self-interest is not served.

The causes of anti-Americanism are numerous. Kim Seung-hwan points to the U.S. military bases in Korea, South Korean media's bias against the United States, and resentment of U.S. policy.<sup>153</sup> Other sources of anti-Americanism include U.S. policy toward the DPRK, historical perceptions, cultural differences, the neoliberal prescription for the Asian Financial Crisis, and the influence of South Korean left-wing political leaders.<sup>154</sup> Some other causes are anti-Western sentiment, anti-capitalism, the fear of a nuclear war, and the resentment against the hegemonic power.<sup>155</sup>

Washington can improve the U.S.-ROK alliance and reduce the negative impact of anti-Americanism by looking at the causes of the anti-Americanism and undertake changes. This section looks at the history and causes of anti-Americanism. Though the ways of reducing anti-Americanism are apparent, it can only reduce the level of anti-Americanism.

Tim Shorrock sees the U.S. support of President Chun Doo-hwan during and after the Kwangju Uprising in 1980 as the pivotal point that expanded anti-Americanism.<sup>156</sup> Many Korean intellectuals became disillusioned by U.S. policy and thought that Washington's support for South Korean dictator regimes hampered the democratic progress.<sup>157</sup> Before the Reagan-Chun regime, anti-Americanism lacked a cause and wide support base.<sup>158</sup>

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152 Gi-wook Shin, "South Korean anti-Americanism: A comparative perspective," *Asian Survey* 36, no. 8 (August 1, 1996): 798, 800.

153 Seung-hwan Kim, "Anti-Americanism in Korea," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 111.

154 Oh and Arrington, "Democratization and Changing Anti-American Sentiments," 329.

155 Shin, "South Korean anti-Americanism," 789.

156 Tim Shorrock, "The Struggle for Democracy in South Korea in the 1980s and the Rise of Anti-Americanism," *Third World Quarterly*, 8(4)(1986): 1202-1205.

157 Kim, "Anti-Americanism in South Korea," 761-764.

158 Olsen, *U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, 25.

Prior to the early 1980s, the United States was the “the virtuous country”; it was “the friend,” “liberators,” and “savior” from the North Korean invasion in 1950.<sup>159</sup> By the late 1980s, however, anti-Americanism had permeated despite the Korean military regimes’ suppression of the anti-Americanism.<sup>160</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, most South Korean dissidents believed that Washington sympathized with a constitutional democracy against the authoritarian regime of President Park Chung-hee.<sup>161</sup> After the December 12, coup by Lieutenant-General Chun Doo-hwan and the Kwangju Massacre in 1980, the struggle against the Chun regime became a “nationalist struggle for independence from foreign intervention.”<sup>162</sup> Disappointment and frustration for achieving democracy in South Korea changed into anti-Americanism. It was the perceived policy of the United States that the anti-American South Koreans opposed. It was the perceived support of Washington on the continuation of the military regime in Seoul that South Koreans opposed.

In a 1982 poll, 61.6 percent of South Koreans chose the United States as the most favored nation, and 58.1 percent of Koreans were satisfied with the U.S.-ROK relationship.<sup>163</sup> By 1990, the number was down to 38.7 percent.<sup>164</sup> Before the 1990s, anti-Americanism was prevalent among the educated people, but the Kwangju Massacre permeated anti-Americanism throughout the society.<sup>165</sup>

Another source of anti-Americanism stems from the issue of the Korean reunification. Although Washington officially supports the ROK agenda for the reunification, some believe that Washington desires a status quo in the Korean peninsula.<sup>166</sup> In 1990, 79 percent of South Koreans blamed the United States for the division of Korea, and 64 percent responded that Washington was reluctant to see the two

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159 Kim, "Anti-Americanism in South Korea," 751.

160 Ibid., 764.

161 Shorrock, “Rise of Anti-Americanism,” 1198.

162 Ibid., 1205.

163 Shin, "South Korean anti-Americanism," 793.

164 Ibid., 795.

165 Ibid., 801-802.

166 Olsen, *U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, 30.



Koreas reunified.<sup>167</sup> In 1999, 89 percent wanted to maintain the U.S.-ROK alliance, but by 2002, the number was down to 56 percent.<sup>168</sup>

It is unreasonable that the Koreans blame the United States for the division of the Korean Peninsula. The ROC did not recognize the KPG. In 1947, the USSR and the DPRK prevented a general election under a UN watch that would have produced one Korea. In 1950, the PRC intervened in the Korean War and prevented the reunification. South Koreans, however, still believe that Washington's vague policy since the conferences at Cairo, Yalta, and Potsdam "amounted to a tacit invitation to the Russians to occupy the Peninsula, setting in train the events that led to the division."<sup>169</sup> Harrison explains that South Koreans feel that the United States owes Korea because it discarded the Preparatory People's Republic (PPR) under Yo Un-hyong and the trusteeship arrangement for the eventual reunification.<sup>170</sup> Instead, the United States supported Syngman Rhee.

The United States is also blamed for the Kwangju Massacre in 1980. South Koreans believe that the United States is "at least partially responsible" for allowing the former dictator Chun to suppress the Kwangju demonstrators and that the United States was using South Korea as a Cold War pawn for its own strategic interests rather than to promote the human rights and democracy in the ROK.<sup>171</sup> An unpublished 1978 agreement reveals that the ROK had the operational control those activities "not directly concerned on a daily basis with the nation's forward defense."<sup>172</sup> Regardless, South Koreans felt "despair and betrayal" at U.S. support for the Chun regime.<sup>173</sup> During the Reagan era, the U.S.-ROK relationship was good on the surface, and Washington

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167 Selig S. Harrison, *Korean Endgame* (Princeton: the Century Foundation, 2002): 102.

168 Kim, "Anti-Americanism in South Korea," 116.

169 Harrison, *Korean Endgame*, 103.

170 Ibid..

171 Shin, "South Korean anti-Americanism," 793.

172 Ibid..

173 Shorrock, "Rise of Anti-Americanism," 1208.

reassured the ROK of its commitment for the security based on anti-communism.<sup>174</sup> Reagan's support for Chun, however, intensified anti-American sentiment.<sup>175</sup>

U.S. support for the Chun regime was contrary to a U.S. intervention in South Korean domestic affairs when Washington "virtually ordered" Syngman Rhee to resign during the 1960 students' democratic uprising.<sup>176</sup> Washington has faced a no-win situation dilemma in which if the United States acts forcefully, it is perceived as "imperial," and if it does not, then it may be seen as indifferent to democracy.<sup>177</sup> Either action may become a fodder to the anti-Americanism.<sup>178</sup> South Korean opposition leaders and human rights activists criticized the Reagan administration's "quiet diplomacy" on human rights abuse by the Chun regime.<sup>179</sup>

An ongoing source of tension is the SOFA agreement. From 1966 to 1987, the Korea courts handled only 0.7 percent of 39,453 crimes by the U.S. soldiers whereas European courts handled 32 percent of the U.S. military crimes and the Filipino courts handled 21.2 percent.<sup>180</sup> Harrison argues that the 1966 SOFA did not give parity to the ROK as it did to the NATO nations and Japan; furthermore, the revision in 1991 did not improve much for the ROK until the revision in 2000 agreed to turn over serious crimes.<sup>181</sup>

The American neoliberal effort to open up the South Korean economy has been an ongoing source of tension. When Washington demanded opening up the South Korean market in the mid 1980s, farmers, previously pro-American, protested.<sup>182</sup> The

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174 Olsen, *U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, 12.

175 Ibid., 15.

176 Shorrock, "Rise of Anti-Americanism," 757-758.

177 Olsen, *U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, 24.

178 Ibid.

179 Ibid.

180 Kim, "Anti-Americanism in South Korea," 758.

181 Harrison, *Korean Endgame*, 188.

182 Shin, "South Korean anti-Americanism," 794.

mass demonstration in 2008 against the Mad-Cow disease shows that anti-Americanism can become a tool for economic interests.

In 1988, Washington revoked duty-free trade privileges for the ROK, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong.<sup>183</sup> Anti-Americanism worsened when Washington pushed for more economic liberalization in South Korea.<sup>184</sup> The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis intensified the anti-Americanism as the American businesses bought South Korean companies at a bargain price. In this case, anti-Americanism stems from economic friction between Seoul and Washington. Unless Seoul adopts a totally open trade policy and while the Korean economic system is based on exports, this form of anti-Americanism will remain.

One of the underlying sources of the anti-American sentiment arises out of the cultural differences between the United States and Korea. Seung-hwan Kim recommends that the Americans should be aware of “traditional Korean emotionalism” and stop using policies that can be perceived as “arrogant.”<sup>185</sup> In some instances, however, no matter how cautious a U.S. policy is, it may result in an unwanted friction. The South Korean reaction to a U.S. pressure is often nationalistic, and since the mid-1980s, Korean officials complained about the “American callousness, complacency, arrogance, laziness, and lack of empathy for Korean problems.”<sup>186</sup>

A Gallup Korea poll in 1993 showed that 66 percent of South Koreans had a favorable view of the United States, and other polls showed that the number dropped to 58 percent in 1999-2000 and 46 percent in 2003.<sup>187</sup> The 2002 “axis of evil” speech

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183 Olsen, *U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, 47.

184 Kim, “Anti-Americanism in South Korea,” 762.

185 Seung-hwan Kim, “Anti-Americanism in Korea,” *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 119.

186 Olsen, *U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, 22.

187 Oh and Arrington, “Democratization and Changing Anti-American Sentiments,” 328.

increased the anti-Americanism.<sup>188</sup> The Koreans believed that the Bush administration jeopardized South Korea's national security by inflaming the DPRK and opposing the Sunshine Policy.<sup>189</sup>

Nevertheless, the Pew Research Center in 2007 showed that the Korean perception on the United States has improved since 2002.<sup>190</sup> The Koreans with favorable views on the United States registered at 58 percent, 52 percent, 46 percent, and 58 percent in the years, 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2007; 70 percent of South Koreans held favorable views on Americans, and Korea in 2007 was the sixteenth nation with the most favorable sentiment on the United States after India and Japan, while China was at thirty-sixth, Germany at thirty-eighth, and Turkey at the bottom, forty-seventh.<sup>191</sup> This is an improvement since the early 1990s. South Koreans like the American people but not necessarily U.S. policy. The perspectives of Seoul and Washington are naturally different, and South Koreans should not blame Washington for serving its interests. Despite the fluctuation in the anti-American sentiment, the U.S.-ROK alliance has endured.

Perhaps, if democracy in the Middle East is feasible, the history of the U.S.-ROK relationship may give insights into how it may unfold. The democratization of the ROK and its relationship with Washington has been tumultuous. Seoul's policy necessarily reflected the 1980s generation who occupied the power in recent years. Like the Korean War generation with pro-American sentiment faded away, the 1980s generation will fade away also. Those who were born after 1980s have not seen much cause for anti-Americanism unless the older generation transmits anti-Americanism to the next generation.

Despite rising anti-Americanism, the U.S.-ROK alliance is stable because of the mutual recognition of the geopolitical needs in the region. However, there is a need for

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188 Kim, "Anti-Americanism in Korea," 109-111.

189 Ibid., 109-110.

190 "Global Unease with Major World Powers: Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey. 2007," Pew Research Center, June 27, 2007, 4, 13, 16, 17.

191 Ibid.

the U.S. military to be more sensitive to the demands of the Koreans. As long as the U.S. military and Washington accommodate a certain level of the demands of the Koreans, there should not be much trouble for the U.S.-ROK alliance.

## **2. The Conflict between the Balancer Policy and the Strategic Flexibility**

Whereas Chosun clung onto the status quo at each time of change, the ROK is now showing more flexibility in its foreign policy. It is trying to redefine the U.S.-ROK alliance in recognition of its grown status. One thing is certain that the ROK would be reluctant to revert to Chosun's role as a tributary state or earlier ROK's status as a client of the United States.

The nadir of the U.S.-ROK alliance was during the era of George W. Bush and Roh Moo-hyun of the 1980s anti-government and human rights demonstration era. Roh Moo-hyun and Bush held opposing views regarding the DPRK, and Washington's unilateral policy generated much tension in the U.S.-ROK relationship. Roh Moo-hyun and President Bush did not have a good relationship nor a similar strategic vision. The biggest challenge for the U.S.-ROK alliance was that Washington and Seoul do not share a common vision for the future and the DPRK. It remains to be seen how Lee Myong-bak will improve the U.S.-ROK alliance with the Obama administration.

Roh Moo-hyun wanted to establish a strategic and diplomatic balance between Washington and Beijing.<sup>192</sup> Roh Moo-hyun sought to have the United States request permission to use the Korean bases for military operations in Asia eroded the perceived strength of the U.S.-ROK alliance.<sup>193</sup> Washington wants strategic flexibility and desires to contain the DPRK and the PRC, but Roh Moo-hyun wanted to limit the scope of the U.S.-ROK alliance to the Korean Peninsula.<sup>194</sup> Taik-young Hamm believes that the

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192 Chung, "Public Opinions and Elite Perceptions," 215.

193 Romberg, "U.S. Strategic Interests."

194 Taik-young Hamm, "The ROK Towards Defense Self-Reliance," *Military Technology*, January 1, 2007, 337.

advanced technology rendered the ROK far more superior to the DPRK and that the USFK became a “surplus defense asset.”<sup>195</sup>

In 1999, the Kim Dae-jung administration displeased Washington when Seoul decided not to join the Theater Missile Defense (TMD) Plan and refrained from discussing China-related matters at the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG).<sup>196</sup> The TCOG had the potential to institutionalize the cooperative behavior into a “virtual alliance” among the United States, Japan, and the ROK, but Seoul and Tokyo are unlikely to form a security alliance unless the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute is resolved.<sup>197</sup>

Seoul also decided not to be a part of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) because Seoul wanted to avoid issues directly affecting the DPRK although allegedly the PSI did not specifically pinpoint the DPRK.<sup>198</sup> Seoul is asserting more independence away from Washington’s influence.

One apparent reason for the focus on the strategic flexibility of Washington is due to the U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan and the war against terror. The U.S. involvements in Afghanistan and Iraq have reduced Washington’s military attention to Asia.<sup>199</sup> Also, as the PRC rises, tension in the U.S.-ROK alliance came from Seoul’s efforts to establish a strategic and diplomatic balance between the United States and the PRC.<sup>200</sup> One possible scenario is that the United States can assume an “offshore-dominant” role and let the ROK assume larger share of its own security.<sup>201</sup>

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195 Chung, “Public Opinions and Elite Perceptions,” 338.

196 Chung, “Public Opinions and Elite Perceptions,” 215.

197 Kun Young Park, “A New U.S.-ROK Alliance: a Nine-Point Policy Recommendation for a Reflective and Mature Partnership,” The Brookings Institute, June 2005.

198 The US-ROK Strategic Forum, “Common Strategic Vision.”

199 Ibid.

200 Chung, “Public Opinions and Elite Perceptions,” 215.

201 The US-ROK Strategic Forum, “Common Strategic Vision.”

### 3. The Conflict between the U.S. Policy on the DPRK and the Sunshine Policy

The Sunshine Policy initiated under the Kim Dae-jung administration became a contentious issue between Washington and Seoul. Since the 1994 North Korean Nuclear Crisis, Washington and Seoul have insisted on its own approach, perhaps mutually detrimental to its intended goal. Washington felt “sidelined” as Seoul actively pursued to reduce tensions with Pyongyang.<sup>202</sup> Many South Koreans have reduced threat perception on the DPRK and “pity” rather than “fear” the DPRK.<sup>203</sup> The ROK still provides aid even when the DPRK moved equipments back to the reactor site.<sup>204</sup> Pyongyang has built a more capable ICBM even as Washington has tried to dissuade Pyongyang’s nuclear ambition.<sup>205</sup> South Koreans are likely to blame the DPRK’s nuclear program on the failed policy of the Bush administration on Pyongyang.

Washington had been hawkish on the DPRK nuclear issue. The hawks argued for regime change as the most effective way to solve the nuclear and human rights issue in the DPRK.<sup>206</sup> They argue that a rogue state is not “reformable,” it is wrong to support such a “morally apprehensible” state, and engagement ultimately increases “moral hazard” for other rogue nations.<sup>207</sup>

Believing that the primary motivation of “malignant narcissist” Kim Jong-il for the development of nuclear weapons is to militarily reunify the two Koreas, in 2003 the National Institute for Public Policy (NIPP) recommended deterrence against and coercion on the DPRK.<sup>208</sup> Terry Stevens et al. advocated for missile defense, the PSI, and

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202 Chung, “Public Opinions and Elite Perceptions,” 105.

203 The US-ROK Strategic Forum, “Common Strategic Vision.”

204 Choe Sang-hun, “N. Korea Warned of Reactor Work,” *The New York Times*, September 5, 2008.

205 “North may use secret base to fire new ICBMs,” *JoonAng Daily*, September 11, 2009.

206 Michael J Green, “Nuclear Shockwaves: Making the Best of Bad Options,” *Arms Control Today* 36, no. 9 (November 1, 2006): 12.

207 Victor Cha and David Kang, *Nuclear North Korea: a Debate on Engagement Strategies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 16.

208 Terry C. Stevens, David J. Smith, Chuck Downs, and Robert Dujarric, “Deterring North Korea: U.S. Options,” *Comparative Strategy* 22, no. 5 (December 1, 2003): 489-493.

isolating Pyongyang, which could “contribute to the destabilization of regime,”<sup>209</sup> but they did not mention the unpalatable casualty in the Korean Peninsula in case of a conflict. For Koreans and Chinese, the collapse of the DPRK has an immediate impact on stability and economic prosperity.

While the Bush administration had refused to negotiate directly with Pyongyang since 2002, Pyongyang processed plutonium and tested a nuclear device.<sup>210</sup> Miroslav Nincic argues that Washington has not been successful in its use of “punitive diplomacy.”<sup>211</sup> Paul Chamberlain asserts that “the Bush administration empowered North Korea to become a nuclear weapons state.”<sup>212</sup> Michael Green believes that the policy of regime change opposes the current goal of the Six-Party Talks, and the collapse of the DPRK can increase the proliferation of the WMD technology.<sup>213</sup>

Washington’s hawkish stance against Pyongyang is in contrast with Seoul’s rather overly lenient approach under the Roh Moo-hyun administration. Under the Sunshine Policy, Seoul provided assistance to Pyongyang without quid pro quo.<sup>214</sup> Engagers believe that Pyongyang’s feeling of insecurity and the lack of communication with Kim Jong-il pose obstacles, but in order to pursue denuclearization, Washington must convince Pyongyang that it desires a behavioral change, not regime change.<sup>215</sup>

Unable to convince Washington to abandon its hawkish stance against Pyongyang, Seoul implemented its engagement policy through the rail and highway across the DMZ, the Kaesong Industrial Complex, and tourism.<sup>216</sup> Engagement policy and aid, however, enable Pyongyang to maintain a nuclear program and military such that

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209 Stevens et al., “Deterring North Korea,” 491.

210 “Now He’s Ready to Deal,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 2002.

211 Miroslav Nincic, “The Logic of Positive Engagement: Dealing with Renegade Regime,” *International Studies Perspectives* 7 (2006), 322.

212 Paul F. Chamberlain “Six-Party Talks: Time for Change,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 8, no. 1 (January 1, 2007), 63.

213 Green, “Nuclear Shockwaves,” 12.

214 Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 105.

215 Green, “Nuclear Shockwaves,” 10.

216 The Atlantic Council Working Group, “A Framework for Peace and Security in Korea and Northeast Asia,” the Atlantic Council of the United States, April 2007.



it self-defeats its intended goal.<sup>217</sup> Previously, Seoul's approach of using economic means was shown to be effective when Seoul tried to normalize diplomatic relation with Beijing. If Seoul does not seek the collapse of the DPRK, which will be a cause for the PLA to move into collapsed North Korea, it might as well sustain or improve the economic condition of the DPRK. As more time passes under the Korean armistice, the succeeding generations of North Koreans may develop a reduced perception of the security threat. An improved economy in the DPRK and the prolonged separation, however, may reduce the chance for the reunification.

The DPRK's nuclear test in October 2006 confirmed the failure of the policies by Washington and Seoul; furthermore, it seems that Pyongyang used negotiations as a delaying tactic and had intended to develop the nuclear weapons regardless.<sup>218</sup> In 2005, Pyongyang displayed "complete disinterest" in energy assistance from Seoul.<sup>219</sup> The Agreed Framework, the October 2000 Joint Communiqué, the September 2005 Joint Statement, the February 2007 Joint Agreement repeat the same agenda without much progress. Between Washington and Pyongyang, there was no full political and economic normalization, no liaison offices in each capital, and no economically beneficial cooperation and exchange. In October 2008, the Bush administration finally removed the DPRK from the list of terrorism-sponsoring nations.<sup>220</sup>

In 2007, the Atlantic Council recommended reciprocity, bilateral negotiation, a "comprehensive settlement" on military, political, economic, and nuclear issues, a formal cessation of hostilities, economic and diplomatic carrots, a new multilateral regional security regime of Northeast Asia, military confidence building measures, and synchronizing Washington's and Seoul's policy toward Pyongyang.<sup>221</sup> There is a need to

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217 The Atlantic Council Working Group, "Framework for Peace and Security."

218 Green, "Nuclear Shockwaves," 9-10.

219 Ibid., 11.

220 Helene Cooper, "U.S. Declares North Korea Off Terror List," *The New York Times*, October 12, 2008.

221 The Atlantic Council Working Group, "Framework for Peace and Security," 31-32.

eliminate Pyongyang's assertion of the imminent security threat by the United States that justifies Pyongyang's oppressive regime.<sup>222</sup>

Chamberlain believes that coercive diplomacy is counterproductive and argues for "[c]onstructive, [c]omprehensive [d]iplomacy" that addresses Pyongyang's security paranoia and xenophobia through negotiations.<sup>223</sup> If Washington and Seoul can agree on a common approach, even if it may not work, the U.S.-ROK alliance will strengthen, and anti-American sentiment arising out of policy difference may be reduced.

### **C. THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE AND EAST ASIA**

Many Americans regards Japan and Australia as more dependable allies than the ROK, and Seoul was concerned when Condoleeza Rice called the ROK a "global partner" and Japan and Australia as "allies."<sup>224</sup> Washington is relying more on Japan as a counter to China.<sup>225</sup> As Washington fosters a triangular alliance between the United States, Japan, and Australia, Washington might downgrade the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance.<sup>226</sup>

If the U.S. economy continues to face challenges, Washington may consider even further reducing the U.S. presence in the ROK. As the presence of the United States lengthens and the Korean economy has grown, tensions arose on the issue of burden sharing for the U.S. troops in Korea.<sup>227</sup> The direct cost of maintaining the U.S. troops in Korea amounts to \$2 billion annually, but depending on a method of accounting, the actual annual total cost could go up to \$42 billion.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Green, "Nuclear Shockwaves," 11.

<sup>223</sup> Chamberlin, "Six-Party Talks," 65.

<sup>224</sup> "S. Korea: From U.S. Ally to Mere 'Partner'?" *The Chosun Ilbo*, June 10, 2008.

<sup>225</sup> Jae Ho Chung, "South Korea between Eagle and Dragon," *Asian Survey* 41, no. 5 (September 1, 2001): 791.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Harrison, *Korean Endgame*, 188.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 184.

Between 1995 and 2004, Americans placed Japan as a top-ten ally whereas in the same period, the ROK was placed only once at top-ten after dispatching 3,000 ROK troops to Iraq in 2003.<sup>229</sup> In 2002, Americans chose the ROK as the top-five most “unfriendly” nations toward the United States.<sup>230</sup>

The majority of South Koreans perceive Japan as the most threatening state.<sup>231</sup> In 2002, more than 90 percent of Korean responders were against Japanese rearmament and 66 percent of the ROK legislators believed that Japan is the biggest threat to East Asia.<sup>232</sup> South Koreans might be more favorable toward rising China than a resurgent Japan.<sup>233</sup> Chung worries that if Japan becomes more militarily assertive, Seoul may move closer to Beijing.<sup>234</sup> As long as Washington acts as the mediator of Tokyo and Seoul, or if the relations between Tokyo and Seoul improve, Chung, however, would not have to worry.

The U.S.-ROK alliance helps to allay any fears of Japanese military capability and intent in the minds of South Koreans. A strong presence of the U.S.-ROK alliance eliminates the need for an alliance between Seoul and Tokyo. A Japan-ROK alliance would be a formidable challenge to the PRC. Beijing is not likely to respond favorably on the ROK-Japan alliance. If the U.S.-ROK alliance is abrogated, Seoul faces an immediate security concern as to which nation to build an alliance with. If history is of any guide, Korea has never formed an alliance with Japan. Therefore, waning U.S. influence in the region does not serve South Korea’s strategic needs. If Washington were to abandon Seoul as an ally, it remains to be seen if Seoul will show its utmost flexibility and form a Japan-ROK alliance.

The justification of the USFK and the U.S.-ROK alliance is based on the North Korean threat. The Korean reunification will “upset the tentative balance” in East Asia

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229 Chung, “Public Opinions and Elite Perceptions,” 220 -221.

230 Ibid., 222.

231 Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 85.

232 Chung, “Public Opinions and Elite Perceptions,” 229.

233 Chung, “Korea between Eagle and Dragon,” 791.

234 Chung, “Public Opinions and Elite Perceptions,” 225.

and will have a “major impact” on the U.S. alliance system.<sup>235</sup> Selig Harrison does not believe that the U.S. forces are needed in the Korean Peninsula to deter the DPRK aggression and to stabilize Northeast Asia; he believes that the DPRK’s dismal economy cannot support a DPRK’s aggression, and the U.S. military presence in the Korean Peninsula may instead increase regional tensions.<sup>236</sup> The ROK in 1988 was nearly capable of defending themselves with the exception of air, naval, and strategic forces.<sup>237</sup> Hamm believes that advanced weapons and information technology rendered the ROK far more superior to the DPRK’s capability and that the USFK is a “surplus” defense asset.<sup>238</sup>

While many U.S. analysts advocate for a post-reunification alliance between the United States, Japan, and the ROK, Selig Harrison argues for simultaneous termination of security treaties, if Beijing, Moscow, and Tokyo would formally pledge for non-intervention in the Korean Peninsula.<sup>239</sup> In contrast to Harrison’s argument, whereas the EU nations have long been able to cooperate against the mutual threat of the USSR and perhaps developed a norm to trust each other in security matters, there has not been a broad and comprehensive cooperative behavior in East Asia. Although there are more cultural similarities among Asian nations, each nation has its own distinctive culture, and nationalism is hardly a unifying factor. The pledge for non-intervention has been violated in the past.

The ROK cannot be a balancer between the United States and the PRC.<sup>240</sup> Efraim Karsh, Robert Manning, and James Przystup believe that neutrality for buffer states does not work, and Jae Ho Chung believes that the ROK does not have an option to declare neutrality.<sup>241</sup> The late nineteenth century showed that the major powers in the region

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235 Robert A. Manning, "Will the Koreans Play the China Card?" *The International Economy*, March/April 1997, 19.

236 Selig Harrison, "Time to leave Korea?" *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 2 (March 1, 2001): 65.

237 Olsen, *U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*, 57.

238 Hamm "ROK Towards Defense Self-Reliance," 338.

239 Harrison "Time to leave Korea?" 78.

240 Hamm "ROK Towards Defense Self-Reliance," 341.

241 Chung, "Korea between Eagle and Dragon," 789.

worried about the geopolitical location of the Korean Peninsula and intervened for the domination of Korea. Neutrality was not an option for Korea. Japan finally colonized Korea after its successful campaigns against the Qing and Russia in the early twentieth century.

Even if the major powers pledge non-military intervention in the Korean Peninsula, the ROK is likely to maintain a strong military, whether in technology or manpower, to compensate for the absence of the USFK, unless its economy and unwillingness to pay for the military expenditure override its security threat perception. Hamm, however, recommends Seoul not to pursue an arms race against its more powerful neighbors because the ROK simply cannot match the PLA nor the Japanese Navy.<sup>242</sup> Then, in terms of its cost and lethality, a nuclear option becomes appealing to the ROK. The U.S.-ROK alliance, however, is the more preferable option.

In the reunified Korea, nationalism will be stronger. The syncretism of South Korean nationalism and North Korean *Juche* ideology may become problematic for the region. In economic and military capacity, China and Japan are far stronger. In the absence of the USFK, Seoul may have to reconsider the development of nuclear weapon for security and cost-cutting measure. In terms of the economic cost, the Korean government does not pay much compensation to its draftees, but the ROK is losing valuable man-hours by drafting eligible young men out of work and education. Since the DPRK possesses uranium mines, the reunified Korea is likely to depend more of its energy sources from the nuclear plants.

A trilateral alliance between the United States, Japan, and the ROK is an option, but it would be met with resistance from anti-Japan sentiment in the ROK. However, Seoul should consider Japan as a strategic ally because it can provide financial loans for the Korean reunification.<sup>243</sup> And yet, Seoul is likely to continue to oppose the trilateral alliance since this would signal to Beijing that Seoul is siding with Washington in an effort to contain China. Unlike Seoul, Tokyo is more willing to foster a stronger alliance

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<sup>242</sup> Hamm "ROK Towards Defense Self-Reliance," 340.

<sup>243</sup> Ko, "Independent Foreign Policy," 268.

with Washington, and in March 2005, Tokyo and Washington showed solidarity as they declared the “peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait.”<sup>244</sup>

Another unlikely option for the ROK is to bandwagon with China and abrogate the U.S.-ROK alliance. Because of the “brotherhood sealed in blood” between the PRC and the DPRK, it is unlikely that the ROK will fully bandwagon with Beijing.<sup>245</sup> There are fundamental differences in the culture, identity, and government systems of South Koreans and Chinese. Also, the ROK would lose more if the USFK departs the Korean Peninsula because of the high military expenditure to fill the gap left by the USFK.<sup>246</sup> Seoul would have to worry about foreign investors’ confidence if there were no longer the U.S. security umbrella. The ROK policy toward the United States affects its national security and its economy.<sup>247</sup> Seoul learned a bitter lesson when the foreign capital abruptly left South Korea during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.

The PRC would behave in an imperial manner toward Seoul without the U.S.-ROK alliance. Seoul would lose its leverage against the DPRK. As long as China stays as a communist state, bandwagoning with China is an unrealistic and infeasible option. There may be more conflict of interests than common goal. It is premature for Seoul to bandwagon with China because China’s rise will take a minimum of 20 years.<sup>248</sup> If the PRC becomes stronger than the United States, then the ROK has more reason to maintain the U.S.-ROK alliance to counterbalance the powerful, proximate power.

Given the DPRK threat and the rise of China, the U.S.-ROK alliance may oscillate in strength and gradually be modified to reflect the different priorities of each nation. The US-ROK Strategic Forum recommends Washington and Seoul to develop a

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244 Park, “A New U.S.-ROK Alliance,” 10–11.

245 Chung, “Korea between Eagle and Dragon,” 790.

246 “Stability, Deterrence, and the Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance,” *The Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis*, August 2003.

247 Ko “Independent Foreign Policy,” 268.

248 Chung, “Korea between Eagle and Dragon,” 789.

common approach toward Pyongyang and Beijing; both should employ “strategic patience” and ensure that the PRC will support “regional and global stability.”<sup>249</sup>

Seoul, however, does not want to support the American efforts to counterbalance China because of the Sino-ROK trade and Beijing’s influence over Pyongyang.<sup>250</sup> With Lee Myung-bak administration’s pro-U.S. policy and his focus on the Korean economy, Seoul will maintain or improve the current U.S.-ROK alliance and try to achieve the maximum benefits from doing business with the PRC and the United States.

Seoul abandoned Taiwan and does not want to “offend China.”<sup>251</sup> The Korean Peninsula, however, offers an excellent strategic position. The DIA and NSA want to continue gathering information on China from the facilities in the ROK, and the USFK may prove useful in a conflict over Taiwan.<sup>252</sup> If Washington and Beijing confront each other over Taiwan, Seoul will have to choose a side,<sup>253</sup> or declare neutrality. Seoul is reluctant to let the United States to use the Korean bases to fight a war against China. Beijing would try to shape anti-American sentiment in their advantage.

If Seoul feels threatened by the PRC, one would expect a stronger U.S.-ROK alliance with an aim of balancing or containing the PRC. In the event of reunification, the reunified Korea feeling threatened by the PRC could offer basing rights to the United States not too far from the Chinese border, or it could increase its capability through nuclear program. If the ROK does not feel threatened by the PRC because of the U.S.-ROK alliance, the ROK is likely to maintain the status quo and try to maximize the economic benefits from trade with the United States and the PRC. Harmonious relation between Washington and Beijing is the best situation for Seoul.

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249 The US-ROK Strategic Forum, “Common Strategic Vision.”

250 Park, “A New U.S.-ROK Alliance,” 9.

251 Robyn Lim, “The US-Japan Alliance in the Korean Crucible,” *American Asian Review* 21, no. 3 (October 1, 2003): 7.10.

252 Selig S. Harrison, “South Korea-U.S. Alliance Under the Roh Government,” Nautilus Institute, April 11, 2006.

253 Robert A. Manning, “Will the Koreas Play the China Card?” *The International Economy*, March/April 1997, 62.

Beijing believes that the USFK will continue to stay in the Korean Peninsula to “prevent the empowerment of China and Japan” and to “dominate the construction of a new order.”<sup>254</sup> Beijing will not accept the Korean reunification with the current U.S.-ROK alliance and the USFK north of the DMZ.<sup>255</sup> In case of chaos after Kim Jong-il’s death, “there is a “100 percent possibility of the Chinese troops being stationed in North Korea.”<sup>256</sup> The reunified Korea with 72 million people, a strong combined military, nuclear weapon, and the U.S.-ROK alliance would be unacceptable for the PRC. Another intrusion by the PLA will be met by a fierce anti-China sentiment by the majority of the Koreans.

Although the PRC seems not to oppose the reunification, Beijing would be hesitant to share a border with a reunified Korea allied with the United States. The major powers, especially the United States and the PRC, are reluctant to see the reunification of the Korean Peninsula because they are worried about the stability in the region.<sup>257</sup> The foreign aid to the DPRK despite Pyongyang’s recalcitrant behavior attests to the major powers’ worry about stability. Also, seeing the cost of the German reunification, Seoul is not eager to absorb the DPRK and wants to improve economic standards in the DPRK before the reunification.<sup>258</sup> Nevertheless, if the living standards of the DPRK are improved, what would be a reason for Pyongyang to seek a reunification?

There had been many complaints made by South Koreans regarding the U.S.-ROK alliance. What stands out is that each side feels left out of each other’s plan and intent. Romberg believes that there were not enough prior consultations between Seoul and Washington regarding the southward relocation of the USFK, creating an “uneasy atmosphere.”<sup>259</sup> On the issues of the Sino-American relations and the U.S.-ROK

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254 Fei-Ling Wang, "Joining the Major Powers for the Status Quo: China's Views and Policy on Korean Reunification," *Pacific Affairs* 72, no. 2 (July 1, 1999): 182.

255 Ibid.

256 Jang-yup Hwang, “Forge Closer Ties with China: Senior N.K. Defector,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, September 18, 2008.

257 Wang "China's views and policy," 167.

258 Thomas L. McNaugher, "Reforging NorthEast Asia's dagger? U.S. Strategy and Korean Unification," *The Brookings Review* 11, no. 3 (July 1, 1993): 15.

259 Romberg, “U.S. Strategic Interests,” The Henry L. Stimson Center.



alliance, Washington pursues its own strategy toward Beijing without telling Seoul although Seoul regards the PRC matters as vital to its interests.<sup>260</sup> During the 1991 to 1994 nuclear crisis, though Washington felt that it went through “extensive consultation” with Seoul, Seoul felt that it was “sidelined.”<sup>261</sup>

South Koreans may argue that Washington often sidelined Seoul in its strategic decision that involved major implications to the Korean Peninsula. The Nixon Shock and the 1994 Nuclear Crisis are examples. From South Korean perspectives, Washington took over the 1994 nuclear crisis and reached the Agreed Framework without involving Seoul.<sup>262</sup> Many South Koreans were shocked years later when they found out how close former President Clinton came to authorizing military operations against the DPRK.<sup>263</sup> Likewise, Seoul did not consult with Washington on a major event; Seoul notified the CIA just 36 hours before announcing the Inter-Korean Summit in 2000.<sup>264</sup>

Technical and political consultation builds “confidence in members’ expectations of their allies’ behavior.”<sup>265</sup> In order to improve the U.S.-ROK alliance, Washington and Seoul must utilize consultative processes such as the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG), the Korea-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting (SCM), the Strategic Consultation for Allied Partnership (SCAP), and other necessary forums. Consultations should be informative as to one’s intent so that Seoul and Washington can prepare or readjust their priorities well ahead.

The USFK Commander, General Burwell Bell stated that the U.S.-ROK alliance should not just focus on the DPRK threat, and he stressed a “multi-dimensional alliance whose members share the fundamental values of democratic principles, individual

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<sup>260</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 109.

<sup>261</sup> George Ehrhardt, "The Evolution of US-ROK Security Consultation," *Pacific Affairs* 77, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 676-677.

<sup>262</sup> Norman D. Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind? The U.S.-ROK Security Relationship after 9/11* (Santa Monica, Arlington, Pittsburgh: RAND Corporation, 2004), 36.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Kim, *North and South Korea*, 123.

<sup>265</sup> Ehrhardt "US-ROK Security Consultation," 672.

freedom, and free market enterprise."<sup>266</sup> While small agendas may differ, as long as Washington and Seoul share fundamental principles, the U.S.-ROK alliance will remain.

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<sup>266</sup> Ehrhardt "US-ROK Security Consultation," 672.

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## IV. CONCLUSION

It is inevitable that the PRC will continue to extend its influence over Korea. The ROK recognizes that China as a land-based identity has historically tried to form its sphere of influence and intervened in the Korean affairs. Despite the anti-American sentiment in the ROK, Seoul understands that there is a strong need for the U.S.-ROK alliance not only to deter the DPRK but also to ensure that its maritime power can counterbalance Chinese intrusion in the Korean affairs.

Seoul's foremost agendas are its sovereignty, economic prosperity, and peaceful reunification, and Seoul is likely to prefer to deal with foreign powers that are compatible with its agendas. History illustrates that Korea has preferred to rely on an external power to counterbalance a proximate power, and it would be a tough situation for the ROK to withstand the weight of the PRC alone. Seoul knows that the hectic diplomacy in the period of the waning Yi Dynasty did not produce a dependable ally or a patron.

Koreans remember that when the Qing-Chosun tributary system was weakened, it was followed by the loss of the state due to the major powers' interests in the Korean Peninsula. Chosun lost its sovereignty when it simultaneously pursued the Qing-Chosun alliance, its "alignment with Japan," and "liaising with America."<sup>267</sup> There is a difficulty in juggling major powers to one's advantage.

The formative years prior to the creation of the ROK are replete with injustices done to Koreans. South Koreans will do what is necessary to maintain its hard-won independence and sovereignty. As long as the United States remains pre-eminent in East Asia, the ROK will seek to rely on its maritime power against the continental power, even if domestic sentiment may be against the United States. Seoul has a vested interest in ensuring the pre-eminence of the United States. Seoul must understand that the Westphalian concept of equal standing exists, but it does not apply in East Asia where the ROK is a far smaller power than the PRC, Japan, Russia, and the United States. Seoul needs to accept its physical limitations and act accordingly.

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<sup>267</sup> Chung, *Between Ally and Partner*, 108.

Korean security interests will dominate cultural and economic aspects. Seoul must send an unambiguous signal to Washington that it continues to desire the U.S.-ROK alliance while maintaining its economic relationship with Beijing.

Much of the blame for the failure of the DPRK lies with the failure of its regime, but if the external support of a patron is any measure, the United States did far better with the ROK than the PRC did with the DPRK. When historically compared, the United States has been far more benign in its treatment of its ally and supported the ROK through military and economic assistance when the ROK needed it the most at the beginning of the republic. The United States helped the ROK to become a strong and affluent nation. This is significantly different from the Qing-Chosun tributary relationship in which the Qing extracted economic resources from the Chosun economy and enfeebled its power. It would be interesting to see if the ROK can extract profits from trading with the PRC and the United States. The fact that Washington shows little interest in normalization with the DPRK is one of the manifestations that Washington prefers dealing with Seoul. It also helps the ROK as the legitimate government on the Korean Peninsula.

Chosun existed from 1392 to 1910, longer than any other regimes in China and Japan. The people of Chosun Yi Koreans were conservative and sought order in domestic and foreign affairs based on the Confucian ideas. In fact, they took pride in preserving the tradition and rejecting changes. If the identity of the Koreans has not changed, it is likely that South Koreans will find comfort in the existing U.S.-ROK alliance to preserve its interests. If the Confucian identity has dwindled due to the Western influence and capitalism, South Koreans might display more flexibility in their affairs. If the Western concept of balance of the power appeals to Koreans, then there are more reasons why the U.S.-ROK alliance will endure.

Because the geopolitical location of Korea cannot be changed, and because the United States has been a good ally for over five decades, Seoul is likely to choose to maintain the U.S.-ROK alliance. Seoul will try to make profits from trading with the

PRC while maintaining a military and strategic alliance with the United States. At any rate, Seoul prefers the current status quo and wants to avoid causing tensions between the United States and the PRC.

Seoul has to convince the major powers that it is not worth fighting over Korea. Beijing and Washington should not be confrontational over the Korean issue. Beijing must recognize that the presence of the U.S. forces is a historical and geopolitical necessity for Korea. It is an opportunity that all sides could develop a cooperative behavior and policy that mutually benefits all the countries involved.

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